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OF EDEN PHILLPOTTS'S DARTMOOR
NOVELS IN TWENTY VOLUMES

VOLUME SEVEN

THE MOTHER

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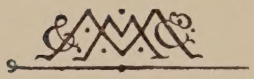

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Vixen Tor

J. Hunt R.W.S. del.

THE MOTHER

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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TO

MY MOTHER

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CHAPTER I

FALLING LEAVES

IN WITHERED CLOUDS and companies the leaves hurried through air and over earth. The rustle and whisper of them was as the murmur of little ghosts; and heart of man, according to its mood, read sorrow into the sound, or the seemly music of obedient multitudes hastening to pay a debt. The flights of the leaves were scattered in constellations above the forest and blown breast-high along the channels of the lanes; they were caught by the rivers, and their ruby and amber danced in masses to brighten foaming waterfall and silent pool; they were drifted against the trunks of ancient trees and banked along the hedgerows; like children to mother earth they returned and nestled in the lap of her who had known the end from the beginning, who had ordained the destiny of every glade and dingle and laughing canopy of green. The leaves were paying for the pageant of the year, heaping their sweetness upon the earth, and returning the precious things garnered at tree-top to the hidden workshop that lifted and maintained each unit of the forest kingdoms.

Now in wisps and canopies they leapt or fell, ruddy and pale. They flew by night or dropped

heavily at the touch of still dawn's finger. The russet, the scarlet, and the etiolate leaf, that had lived its life in shadow, now came together and joined hands in a death dance; fell and flitted and twisted in the gigantic breath of the autumnal equinox; gyrated upward on sudden whirlwinds in lonely places; and sinking at last to the earth, yielded up their treasure in the alembics of the latter rain.

Only beech leaves and oak leaves, like weak souls, clung to dead joy and parent boughs that knew them no more. And it seemed as though the brown spikes that held next year's glory cried to them in the voice of the wind, "Depart, ye auburn shadows, and cease your sobbing; for ye also have won your meed of life's feast from earth and sky. The spring and summer hidden in time are ours. Therefore vanish and haunt the cradle of life with images of death no more."

Upon the fringe of Devon's central waste, beneath the woods, where they extend between a river valley and the Moor above, two women walked and talked together. Rachel Bolt was old, and her grey hair and wrinkled forehead chimed with the season's fall and made her a figure emblematic of the hour. But Avisa Pomeroy's life halted a while at middle age. She was rather a small woman, dark and full-bosomed, straight and sturdy of build, but inclined to stoutness. The expression of her face was very placid, yet the calm belonged rather to mind than body. She was not strong, and great physical evils haunted her from the darkness of her future.

Avisa showed neither joy nor sorrow while she listened to her older companion; but the bent, autumnal creature spoke fast, and happiness made

her thin voice musical. By their mouths these women might have been judged. The younger's was firm to hardness, yet full in the lip; the older mother had a small mouth, a little fallen in from lack of teeth behind. But more than the shadowed weakness of age marked her lips. They seemed a fit organ for the hopeful, gentle words that issued from them. Her speech also betrayed her. That an old woman could be so sanguine concerning the future served to indicate how many storms of experience had beat upon her head in vain.

"Draw your shawl closer, Rachel," said the younger. "Great news, without a doubt of it. Set down your faggot an' we'll pitch here a bit in the sun. I'm glad I've met you."

Presently the mothers sat side by side while the elder talked. She was a widow and lived with one child at the moorland hamlet of Merivale. Her friend also dwelt close at hand. Avisa had just been to a neighbouring village and, returning homeward, fell in with Mrs. Bolt gathering sticks along the wood.

Now the leaves danced round them, played at their feet, fell impartially on Mrs. Pomeroy's linen sunbonnet and the ancient black straw hat of Rachel. There was rain in the air, and the October afternoon faded.

"She've took him, and who could doubt she would? A very good girl, Avisa, but a very unhappy home. To marry my son Samuel will be a better fate than many young women can look for. I could have wished she was a thought more of a scholar; but Sam's clever enough for them both."

"Jill Wickett's a pretty girl, and I hope from my heart she'll make Samuel a good wife."

"She will—she must. That man—though he

is my own son, I say it—be the chosen of the Lord if ever man was, Avisa! He'll have his store of blessings. Heaven knows him, like it knowed his father afore him."

Mrs. Pomeroy nodded. Her eyes were large and grey, and they looked gentler than her lips. In maidenhood they had seemed the very haunt of wondering innocence; but a little twinkle at the corner of her mouth had always belied them, and still did so.

"'Tis very large-minded in you to take it thus," continued Rachel Bolt, "because well I know your boy, Ives, was set in that quarter too, and naturally you'd have liked such a bowerly wife as Jill for him. But there 'tis: both couldn't have her, and my Samuel was the chosen."

This news, however, by no means troubled the younger mother. The fact meant a painful task presently; but she put the future aside and showed sympathy with her friend.

"Both couldn't have her, as you say, and 'twas more vitty that Samuel should. He's older by five or six year than my son—wiser too."

"A headstrong young youth, your Ives, my dear."

"He is. So was I at his age. 'Tis not a bad thing altogether to want your own way. I like a colt to fight a bit when we're breaking him in."

"Not much more than a smurry to her back will the poor creature have when she comes to Samuel," continued Mrs. Bolt. "They are terrible ill to do, the Wickett family. But I hope she'll be of a saving turn."

"I hope so too. A fuzzy-poll of a maid; but a rare hard worker when in the humour, and very personable."

"Sam have gived her a new dress. You'll see her in it to worship next Sunday."

"An' very nice she'll look, I'm sure."

"The best of it is, Avisa, that I shan't be parted too far from Samuel. Couldn't suffer it—more could he. Why, the dear chap wanted for me to live along with 'em! But 'No, no,' I said. 'Too wise for that. I'll take thicky cottage on t'other side of the road: that's what I'll do.'"

"Be wiser still and go a bit farther off, my dear."

"Samuel won't let me. Besides, there's not another house in Merivale I can have. Very lucky to get one just over against 'em."

"Look you take care, Rachel."

"Don't fear it. My love's my guide. Love be very witty, Avisa. I shall watch, but I shan't interfere."

"There's some people very restive of being watched — especially young married women. When I was a girl, I'd have gone mad to think as a pair of patient old eyes was overlooking my life and seeing all my mistakes and silliness, and saying nought. Why, in my green youth, I often hated to think that God Almighty's Self never had His eye off me!"

She smiled at her maiden thoughts.

"I shall watch, however," repeated Rachel; "but never a word shall I say, well knowing the value of silence. She'll soon learn from him. He'll think for her, same as I've thought for him —same as you do for your boy and girl."

"The strongest mind looks ahead the farthest," declared Avisa Pomeroy. "Childer can't see beyond their little to-morrows, so us must for 'em. And a many growed people can't neither.

My son's not marriage-ripe, Rachel. He's a slow learner. So was I. But come I gathered a bit of knowledge from life, it always stuck fast enough."

"Sorrow's the best schoolmaster, I reckon."

"I don't say that. Happiness have taught me many things too. My boy be stiff-necked and rebellious and passionate. But nobody that loves justice like him will go far wrong in the upshot. A curious bent of mind sometimes. When his little sister died—my third, you know—Ives, six year old he was then, missed her noise the night after, and axed my old mother where she was to. 'She've kissed God, dearie,' says the dear old soul in her fanciful way, and the boy sniffed. 'Poor Milly—she always hated kissing'—that was what he said about it."

"A good churchgoer, however."

"He goes to please me—an' look at the girls."

Mrs. Pomeroy's eyes pictured her boy at worship and twinkled; but Rachel Bolt was shocked.

"Samuel ban't like that. Never did he gaze at a female creature till Jill burst upon him. 'Tis a fine thing for her family—her marrying a Bolt and such a man as Samuel. They be properly pleased about it, I hear."

"So they should be. Now I'll help you with your wood so far as my home."

"Thank you kindly. You must know there ban't no call for me to gather sticks, and Sam often grumbles; but the habit is lifelong, and, just to be alone with my own thoughts, I often come out to do it."

They parted presently where Avisa dwelt, and the elder went slowly forward. She hardly

heard the kindly wishes in her ears, for this great news filled her heart. Her son had been her life for many years. Now he was going to be the life of another. Therefore some fear shadowed the joy that she felt in seeing him joyful.

Avisa's mental attitude to the circumstance was exceedingly different. No regret marked it. She swept aside a passing feeling of surprise that Jill had chosen the simple Sam Bolt when she might have had Ives Pomeroy; then she smiled at her own mother's heart because such a thought had risen; and then she ceased to smile and set her face firmly, almost grimly, to meet her boy.

It was his sister, however, who approached Avisa on her return home. At the door of Vixen Tor Farm, in Walla valley, stood her daughter, and Lizzie Pomeroy's face swiftly showed that she too had heard the news. She was small and very neat, with almost birdlike trimness of dress and person. Her face was bright and fair, with round grey eyes like her mother's, though virginal and rather chill in their expression. But the coldness belonged to temperament and resulted from lack of imagination, not want of knowledge.

"Oh, mother, here's a pretty tantara!" she cried. "Ives be just back from Merivale. That girl, Jill Wickett—she've taken Mrs. Bolt's son, and Ives be using language. And, though I've kept his dinner hot all the afternoon, not a bite will he take."

Her mother did not answer but entered the kitchen of the farmhouse, threw her bonnet on a settle, and then approached her boy.

He sat with his hands in his pockets on one side of the fire; while upon the other old Jane Pomeroy, his dead father's mother, faced him.

The young man's face was dark with passion, and an expression almost malignant reigned upon it. He turned his black eyes on his mother. His hair was rather long and wet with perspiration.

In the momentary silence old Mrs. Pomeroy sighed audibly and rattled her wooden knitting-needles. Ives wore his cap at the back of his head, and Avisa's first act was to take it off and brush the hair from his forehead with her hand.

Then he turned on her.

"If I thought you'd had any part in this, mother, I'd never see your face again—God judge me if I would!"

"I've had no part in it, Ives. I won't say I'm sorry for this, because I'm not. But I'm mortal sorry for your sorrow, my son. 'Tis that I'm thinking on. I'm wondering . . ."

"I don't want none of that soft stuff. If you didn't do this, who did? Is it likely such a sheep-faced, sandy-headed fool as Bolt would have won her away from me single-handed? Somebody helped him, and if 'twasn't you, who was it?"

"You ought to know better than talk to mother like that!" flamed out Lizzie. "Always on your side as she is, and then, just because you're crossed . . ."

"'Crossed!'" he thundered out. "'Crossed!' Is that what you call it, you little fool? 'Crossed!' When a man's life is suddenly knocked all abroad and ruined for evermore by a woman—when . . . And you, with all you want, to preach! There, get out of my sight, you ignorant wretch, or I'll fling a knife at you!"

Lizzie set her lips hard, but tears came into her eyes.

"Don't—don't talk that terrible harsh, Ives,"

said his grandmother. "What do a cheel like her know about it? List to your mother."

"I'll list to nobody," he said. "Tell me who've done it—that's what I want to know."

Avisa sat beside him and took his hand between hers. He snatched it away; then she took it again and he let it remain.

"I'll have it out with the man, whoever 'twas," he said.

"So you shall, then. I know his name very well—an' you do too. What was it you told us at dinner back last week, Ives?"

He reflected, then remembered.

"That me and she had a bit of a flare-up about Samuel Bolt."

"And you said . . .?"

"I said what any man would say. I told her that if she thought she'd be happier with a poor broken-winded fool like him than with a chap like me, she'd better go to him and be damned."

"With that you flung off from her."

"Yes, I did. I was sick of the subject. She was in a woman's mood, and kept on praising the slack-twisted creature till 'twas all I could do to help boxing her ears. Wish I had now."

"When did you see her last?"

"'Pon Sunday after church. I went down so far as Ward Bridge along with her. And little enough she said. Then suddenly she axed, 'Be you going to say you're sorry, Ives?' And I said, 'What for?' Then she said, 'Last week, I should think.' And I said, ''Tis for you, not me, to say you'm sorry.' And she said, 'What a child you be still—doan't know no more about a woman than a cow! You only care for your silly vain self, and that's the ugly truth about you.'

'Twasn't like I was going to stand that. So I had my say short and sharp, and then left her till she'd comed to her senses."

Mrs. Pomeroy looked at him and still held his hand.

"You've answered your own question, my dear. She told you a lot of truth, Ives. 'Twas you and nobody else helped Samuel Bolt to get her."

"You say that!" he cried.

"Sober truth, Ives."

"If you ask me, I think you're well out of it—well out of it," declared Lizzie. Her emotion had passed and she had now grown angry. "A great, untidy, slammocking woman—below you every way. You ought to be thankful, instead of raving at your own mother and sister like a lunatic."

He glared at her, but did not answer.

Then his mother rose and opened the oven door and took out a dish that stood within.

"Come—eat your meat. 'Tis no sense going hungry for it," she said.

He started up violently and used foul language.

"Curse the lot of you—narrow, hard-hearted, frozen creatures that you be! You talk so wise, and me robbed of the only thing in the world I cared about. Precious comfort—the likes of you—to a man. But I'll go my own way now—to hell if I choose. And 'twill be your fault—yours, mother, as much as any—for you never liked her and never helped me to get her. And now—be damned to everybody! I don't care what becomes of any living soul on God's earth no more. And I'll be free, mark me, from this day—free to do what I please and think what I please. So now you know, mother!"

He took his cap, rose, and went out of the house; while Mrs. Pomeroy bent and brushed up the dirt that his boots had left by the hearth.

"He'll be the death of us yet," said Lizzie mournfully; but her mother shook her head and smiled. She was looking after Ives.

"Don't think it," she answered. "'Tis the other way: we'll be the life of him."

"How can you take it so easy, mother! Why, he's been drinking—you know he has as well as I do."

"He has," admitted Mrs. Pomeroy. "Poor, dear, silly boy! Drinking—yes. When I was a maid such things happened to me, Lizzie, that I'd have got drunk too sometimes—if I'd dared."

"Mother!"

Still Avisa's eyes were set on the open door. A strange look rested in them—whimsical, yet wistful too.

"How like him I was once!" she said.

"Never—never!" cried her daughter. "You so patient, so gentle—never vexed with man or mouse—always ready to make excuses for us. Like Ives!"

"There's a lot of difference betwixt four-and-twenty and fifty, my dear. If you'd known your mother when she was your age, Lizzie, you'd have said she wasn't a good companion for you."

"Mother!" the girl gasped again, and her eyes filled with amazement.

Even the aged woman by the fire protested.

"Jimmery, what'll you say next, Avisa?" she asked.

The face of Lizzie's mother twinkled and, to those who understood, might have helped to explain her words. For a moment every line of

her countenance spoke of joy as she looked back; then a cloud fell upon it and she shook her head.

"A very headstrong, own-self maiden, I warn 'e. Hard to please—too selfish to please. Granny here forgets, but I remember; and 'tis well for you children that I do."

She went over to Mrs. Pomeroy the elder.

"Ives be more mine than his father's—as yet," she said.

"Very unlike his father, thank God!" answered the grandmother of Ives. "No more like my son than sense be like foolishness."

"A great soul he had," admitted the widow. "A calm and a thoughtful man."

"And ban't you calm and thoughtful, mother?" asked Lizzie.

"Perhaps—now. But 'twas life taught me. It comed from outside, not from inside. Life—life rubbed down my nature—like the skidded wheel rubs down the road."

"And father?"

"Your father *was* my life—patience made alive, Lizzie."

The old woman nodded in the corner.

"You never said a truer word, Avisa; and all that's best in these children comed from my boy."

"I know it."

Lizzie stood up for her mother.

"You made him the happiest man in the world, anyway, for I've heard Mr. Toop and many another say so. And well you might, a lovely darling dear like you!"

"The loss—the loss—to you and your brother," mourned Jane Pomeroy. "Salvation would his father have been to Ives; but the Lord had need

of my son. 'Twas that thought kept me sane when he went."

"And his babies had need of me," mused the younger mother. "Maybe that thought kept me sane. But we wasn't far off from mad women—you and me."

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSEHOLD OF POMEROY

THE LITTLE HOMESTEAD of the Pomeroys reposed on the southward slope of Vixen beneath the immense rock-masses of that tor. No nobler pile of granite stands upon Dartmoor. It towers gradually to its crown by rampart and bastion; a happy relation of parts has chanced to weld the three main divisions into one perfect whole, and Vixen rises, the very impersonation of strength, solidity, and settled purpose, to be a landmark for time, an emblem of mystery and of power. It has been likened to the Sphinx; ancient antiquaries imagined rock-basins for lustration and sacrifice upon its crown; tradition records that the tor was once used as an observatory, and the passage of planets and stars studied therefrom.

None now ever scrambled up its ascents or stood upon its summit but Ives Pomeroy. Lizzie in her short-skirted time had done the like with help from him; but her days of clambering in the heart of the Vixen were past, and she marvelled, looking back, to remember them. Ives had the tor to himself and still delighted in its secret places, still stole thither to think and smoke, still found some pleasure in his dead boyhood's

dreams of great sieges and heroic deeds. But when knowledge and life killed the first flood of imagination, when he left the village school and began to learn his father's business of crops and flocks, he still carried love of adventure into adolescence.

Vixen marked the red-letter days of his life. He remembered the proud moment when his strength got him to the top. He recollected each discovery of some new wonder. The clefts and crannies and secret places were all known to him. He had names for every boulder and cave. Over his pipe, in some shadowy niche only seen by the sun and the jackdaws, he often retraced the old fancies still and never laughed at them.

Now, striding passionately into gloaming of night, Ives turned by instinct to his giant playmate, crept inside a little penthouse, and flung himself down to reflect on this sudden stroke of fate. The evening wind cooled his head presently and lifted the fumes of liquor that still hung heavy there.

Beneath him lay the farm and its immediate cultivated lands. A few small fields subtended the kitchen garden. Then plantations of larch and pine sank to the water. Walla ran near enough to be heard at all times, and her murmur came to Ives through the thinning gold of the larches. About the dwelling of the Pomeroys stood a fir or two, and behind it the Moor stretched in a rugged coomb upward. At this season autumnal furzes still flamed, and rich mosaic of weathered granite with warm tints of herbage dappled the waste. A stream ran through the midst, a white-thorn or two arose beside it; and above them stood the 'Windystone'—a

venerable cross that marked some vanished pack-saddle track of the path followed from monastery to monastery by mediæval monks.

A feature of the Pomeroys' homestead was an oak coppice, that stood on the opposite bank of the river and covered five acres of the hillside. It represented a rich harvest, though the crop was reaped but four times in a century. Every five-and-twenty years the vigorous young forest growth fell at springtime and gave varied treasures of poles, bark, faggots, and charcoal. From fifteen to twenty pounds an acre accrued from the cutting of the coppice: the rind went to the tanners; the best poles were appropriated for building, fencing, and hurdling; the brushwood commanded half-a-crown a faggot, and the charcoal, sold at the char-heaps, was worth two shillings a bushel. Next year would see the coppice felled; for among the last things that Avisa's husband had spoken to her on his deathbed was one concerning it. "Mind," said he, "that if you'm spared, you cut the copse-wood in the year Ives be turned five-and-twenty; an' if all's well with him an' Lizzie, I'd wish for that money to be divided betwixt 'em as a gift from their father."

Now Ives turned, pursued his thoughts, brooded revenge, and lighted another pipe. He was not a man of middle courses, and he continued to remain very young for his age. It appeared unlikely that he would succeed largely, and most who knew him foretold actual failure; but for the present he went much untried, because his mother was content to hold the helm, as she had done since her husband's death. Ives knew his business and understood that the

salvation of the moorland farmer is the Moor. He grazed, therefore, but he cultivated little. He was lazy and avoided responsibility. Lizzie, on the contrary, a true Pomeroy, was methodical, trustworthy, diffident, lacking in self-reliance. The brother and sister had been close friends in childhood, and were only separated by two years; but now Lizzie put away childish things and was as serious-minded as a maiden of two-and-twenty can sometimes be. Ives alarmed her. He also angered her by his sweeping opinions, by his impatience, by his amorous attitude to girls in general, by his openly expressed contempt for her second-hand wisdom. For Lizzie copied her mother and strove to be like her; she also copied her sweetheart, a village schoolmaster, but her brother copied nobody. Old Mrs. Pomeroy found little to admire in her grandson, and often regretted that he was not more like his father. Round this bygone yeoman's memory had settled great legends of virtue and wisdom. But Lizzie and Ives were only little children when their father died, and had no personal recollection of him. It became them, therefore, to take on trust the picture painted by a loving wife and doting mother. Lizzie believed with her whole heart; Ives doubted whether anybody so good, so wise, so great as his father was reported to have been had ever lived.

Two hinds—an old man and a young one—completed the establishment at Vixen Tor Farm. Emmanuel Codd, the elder, was a soured and suspicious peasant who earned his money, but never allowed that any other labouring man on Dartmoor honestly did so. The younger, Rupert Johnson, happily for his peace of mind, possessed

neither nerves nor pride. He pleased his mistress and contented Ives. More he did not seek to do. Emmanuel's ceaseless grumbling left his fellow-labourer indifferent and unconcerned. Indeed, the condition of Mr. Codd's mind was chronic, and the disease of detraction had spread through it. He distrusted human nature from every possible point of view; and humanity retorted by detesting him. It was his custom to give notice about every six months, and Mrs. Pomeroy always fell in with the suggestion and expressed regret that he must be leaving them at last. There the matter ended. Relations were strained at the present moment, and, without actually naming dates, the head man declared that, after the felling of the coppice during the coming year, he should retire. He also openly named the pension that he expected to receive as the reward of forty-five years' service.

Ives, to mark the height of his misery, stopped in his lair on the Vixen until nearly midnight. Then, guessing that the farm must be asleep, and that he might descend to the details of eating a big supper without human eye to note the sordid, necessary deed, he crept home again.

A lamp burned low in the kitchen and a scrap of paper lay beside it. How well he knew those little notes. He glanced at it and read :

"Supper in the oven. Good night, dear heart.—MOTHER."

Then he twisted up the message and flung it into the dying fire, as he had a thousand like it.

Sleep held the dwelling. A few blackbeetles rustled away as he turned up the light; his dog had heard him and barked on her chain at the

rear of the house. The kitchen walls were covered with a wash of pale apricot colour, and a clock ticked against one of them. Presently it struck twelve. But the noisy gong had been removed during his father's last illness and never restored. The clock purred the hour of midnight rather than struck it.

Ives felt exceedingly sorry for himself, but hunger was at least as pressing as grief. He made a mighty meal, then went to bed and soon escaped his miseries in sleep.

CHAPTER III

'MOLESKIN' ON WOMAN

AFTER WALLA HAS FALLEN from her fountains near the cradle of her greater sister, Tavy, in midmost Moor, she winds south-west and passes downward under Mis Tor into wooded glens beneath the Vixen. But, before she leaves the waste, a bridge of grey stone spans her growing stream, and road and river meet at right angles. Down the great slope eastward this highway falls, then upward climbs again under the triple crown of the Staple Tors; and just beyond the bridge, extended straggling by the path, like a row of tired folk tramping home after a revel, stand the cottages of Merivale. Northward, separated from the village by moorland and its own surrounding fields, the farm of Stone Park lies naked, treeless, and solitary; southward, where Walla flows from the upland austerities into a gentler domain of forest and arable land, there extend regions of cultivation with their dwellings in the midst.

All round about upon this day the stone monarchs of the land thrust sombre heads upward into a stormy sky. Beyond Great Mis Tor something of the central desolation might be seen swept with fog-banks; and the river, in

spate from heavy rain, cried aloud through the valley.

Low, grey, and black, with whitewashed faces and tar-pitched roofs, Merivale stood and faced the south. No special feature marked this uneven row of habitations threaded up the hill, save where, in the midst, from a square building of two stories, a signboard hung and swung backwards and forwards at the thrust of the wind. Newly painted upon it appeared a red-faced trio of gentlemen in scarlet coats and shiny black hats. They smiled at the world with an air of invincible good-nature and high spirits. Above them shone a legend in gold, The Jolly Huntsmen; beneath them, in black letters, it was proclaimed that the brothers Toop were licensed to sell tobacco, snuff, and spirits.

Three tourists had just departed, and for a few minutes Ruth Rendle remained alone. Very little of the professional barmaid appeared in her. Indeed, she was new to the work, and had lived with her cousins, the proprietors of the inn, no more than six months.

Chance suddenly threw Ruth penniless on the world, and chance ordained that the brothers Toop should lose their barmaid by marriage at the same time. Therefore they offered their kinswoman a home in exchange for service. She accepted gladly, came from East Devon to the Moor, did the new work as well as she could, and soon made more friends than she desired.

She was a slim, dark-faced girl of twenty-one, with black hair and rather heavy brows. The expression of her face was, however, lightened by her manner of drawing the hair from it abruptly. She wore no fringe, but curled her locks in one

great coil at the back of her head. Her forehead was rather high, and critics held that Ruth spoilt herself by this display of it; but she was not vain, albeit, as Mr. Peter Toop always said, there was no need for her to show that she had brains by revealing her brow, because one need only to speak to her and the brains would appear. His brother, Mr. Joel Toop, agreed with him.

Ruth was not much of a talker, but she listened well. Men liked to talk to her. A man came in and began talking to her now.

He was tall, thin, and wiry. He wore riding-breeches, and slapped his leg with a hunting crop while he addressed the listener. A hatchet-shaped and rather handsome face belonged to him, but his blue eyes shone cold, his straw-coloured beard and moustache were rough and ill-cared-for. Matthew Northmore's voice was pleasant and his intonation clean, strong, and little marked by any trace of vernacular speech. He had not come to drink. Indeed, he was an abstainer from alcohol, and the brothers Toop occasionally considered the question and wondered whether a hint might be dropped upon the subject.

"A delicate-minded man would do something, if 'twas only lemonade," declared Joel, and Peter concurred.

The brothers were not, however, blind to Northmore's attention. Indeed, personal interest quickened their observation where Ruth was concerned, and they, as well as other people, including the girl herself, knew very well what drew an unsociable and lonely spirit so often to the bar of the Jolly Huntsmen.

Never until the arrival of Miss Rendle had

the master of Stone Park thrust himself into company. He lived aloof, farmed his acres, grazed his herds, and found pleasure in fox-hunting. He was thirty-eight years old, reserved, and shy. Now a thing, common enough to the lonely soul not yet turned of forty, had befallen him. Women figured but little in his life, and he had never loved one until the voice and direct gaze and subtle quality of Ruth combined to waken his heart and save it from sexual atrophy. He was in love, and the passion feeding on virgin material swelled swiftly to a fierce fire. A man extremely sensitive until now, the new emotion made him face his fellows with a blunt indifference that amazed himself. He knew that they laughed and talked about him behind his back; and such a thought in any other relation would have made him shrink; but since Ruth Rendle was the matter, he scoffed at secret criticism, pushed to her side fearlessly before all eyes, and, despite many an open wink and whisper, fought with all his immense vigour and despite his immense inexperience to win her.

"'Tis very good of you, I'm sure," declared Ruth. As she spoke, she stroked the breasts of two snipe that Matthew had brought her.

"Don't you let those old men eat them," he said. "I know how greedy fond they are of game. But these are for you."

She nodded.

"I'll remember."

"Hounds meet at the 'Windystone' on Friday fortnight. Is there a chance of you running out for an hour?"

"Not a chance. We shall be very busy before the meet, and maybe again after. You be going hunting?"

"Yes, I suppose so. 'Tis my only pleasure. At least it was—till . . ."

She kept silence and caressed the dead birds. Then she spoke, since he added nothing to his broken sentence, but only looked down at her hand.

"Do you ever read books of an evening?"

"Now and again. But not often—not much of a scholar, I'm afraid."

"More am I; yet I'm very fond of books."

He scented a possibility.

"What sort of books?"

"You'll laugh. I like rhymes."

"Do you now! Whoever would have thought it? I believe I've gotten a fat old volume of verses somewhere. 'Twas my sister's. She left it behind her when she went to be married."

"You might lend it to me, Mr. Northmore."

"I will, Miss Rendle, and glad to. I'll bring it up to-night."

"Next time you're coming be quite soon enough."

"Next time I'm coming will be to-night," he said. Then he paused, next he tried clumsily to get conversation on to more personal topics.

"I—I do wish, if I may make so bold . . ." he began, but his desire was never uttered, for two men entered the bar and Ruth turned to them.

One had passed middle age, but his eyes were still young and bright. Laughter made a home therein, yet heavy brows overhung them and the left eyelid half hid the iris. William Cawker had used his sight through the hours of darkness for so many years that an eternal frown wrinkled the brows, and this physical accident belied a

geniality that beamed from the rest of his face. He was a kind-hearted man. He declared openly that he had walked the broad road for so many years that the narrow one had ceased to be possible for him. His master-passion was sport, and it took the form of poaching. Indeed, he considered this the highest branch of sport, since it held a salt lacking from any form of legitimate slaughter. He belonged to the old order, and had learned his business from a father whose leg had been broken in a man-trap. Nobody ever called this grey-whiskered and humorous person Cawker. He was known as 'Moleskin' within his radius, and a mangy waistcoat of that material, which seemed part of him, accounted for the nickname. For the rest he went habitually in the colours of earth, and his great pockets were stained with blood of bird, beast, and fish. None could remember him in a black coat. It was known that Moleskin had been to prison in his earlier days, and all men believed that he had earned similar chastisement on many a subsequent occasion; but with age he had perfected his craft, and gamekeepers and water-bailiffs cursed in vain. He enjoyed his life—a condition not shared by the bedridden wife and careworn daughter who completed his household. They lived two miles from Merivale, in a cottage of four rooms; and the women found themselves anxious and miserable above the common lot, for their man's days and nights were one long battle with order, honesty, and law. So far he had conquered; but he grew older, and Mrs. Cawker, with a large experience in poachers and their inevitable end, wished that the climax would come and her suspense terminate.

Moleskin went his way with unfailing cheerfulness of spirit. He made money, but was always in debt to those who would trust him. Here and there certain people permitted him to pay in kind, and the brothers Toop, albeit they mourned his unrighteous ways, would usually let a brace of birds or an occasional salmon rub off a part of his formidable score in the taproom. Others did the like.

With the poacher came Ives Pomeroy, and it was significant of their steady patronage that Ruth, without asking either, poured out the liquor each desired. Rum was Moleskin's invariable stimulant; he never partook of anything else. As for the youth, he drank beer.

"Put your coin back," said Mr. Cawker. "I'm standing to-day, and the money's got feathers on it."

He set down a double-barrelled breech-loader, thrust his hand into a roomy pocket, and produced a brace of golden plover. The blood was still bright upon them. They had just flown from afar to win this harsh welcome.

Matthew Northmore was interested.

"You got some, then?" he asked. "I saw a flight after dawn this morning, wheeling aloft. Then they faded away, flying high, and I judged they was bound for the north."

"You judged wrong," said Moleskin. "I seed 'em too, and guessed they meant to stop in the bogs down under White Tor. And I guessed right—according to my custom in the matter of such things. I'll take a wing feather or two for peel flies, miss. And mind you tell Peter Toop that the birds be worth two shilling apiece—not a halfpenny less."

"You old liar!" said Northmore. "Two shilling a pair to Plymouth market any day."

"No, no, farmer. A liar I may be in and out —as we all are—more shame to us—even you. But not over a solemn matter like my debt to the Jolly Huntsmen. Four shilling should be took off—or say three-and-six and allow for interest."

Ives talked to Ruth Rendle. He had still but one subject of conversation, though the matter of the engagement was now a fortnight old. He had wearied most ears with his wrongs.

"As good as tokened, mind you—planned out to the very end."

"Then she flickered out in a green dress to church, I'm told," said Moleskin. "Not so green as you was when you heard poor Sammy Bolt had gived it to her out of his savings. Well, well, there's as good fish in Walla as I've ever catched there. Ban't there, miss?"

"You may be well out of it," said Northmore. But his tone showed no friendship for Ives. Indeed, he held the young man in some scorn.

"Very likely—though I didn't know as you pretended to understand the women," retorted Ives. "Perhaps Miss Ruth here be putting you up to a thing or two?"

Matthew shrugged his shoulders, avoided the girl's face, and himself asked a question.

"Who are you to call her 'Miss Ruth'? More civil if you said 'Miss Rendle,' I should think."

Ives laughed.

"I'll call her the Queen of England if she likes. She understands me very well. Don't you teach me how to treat the girls. I know a damned sight more about 'em than an old bachelor like you do, anyway."

The farmer turned his back on Pomeroy and spoke to Ruth.

"I'll bring you the book this evening," he said. Then he left the bar.

Moleskin winked over his tumbler at Ives.

"Had him there, my bold boy. Couldn't answer that, because he knowed 'twas true. Rather a tough bird to begin love-making, eh? Don't you lose your heart too quick, miss—else you may be sorry when 'tis too late."

Ruth looked uncomfortable and pained. She picked up the birds and departed through a door at the back of the bar. Left without an eye upon him, Moleskin swiftly stole two boxes of matches, half a lemon, and a little glass sugar-crusher. Then he turned to Ives with flattery.

"You understand 'em, almost so well as I did in my young days. Women be a noble branch of larning, and they'm like reading, or writing, or figures—to some they come as easy as pat; others, do what they will, can't get no forwarder. I loved 'em from the time I was fourteen. But there's some men be always dunces—like that sandy chap as have just gone out of the bar. Near forty and don't know no more than the dead how to set about 'em! Wasted his youth, he did."

"Nobody's going to look at an ugly, hard-voiced, hard-eyed fool like him," declared Ives.

"Ban't that: there's no male living that can't find a market somewhere, owing to the laws of supply and demand. But he mustn't hope high now. This here bowerly maiden—she won't never look at him if I understand anything about 'em. She'd rather take me if I was free! Or even you, glumpy and glowering and sulky as you be."

"I see nothing in her."

"I see a lot. She's the right sort—good moss for some stone she'll be. You don't often get silence without sense. One more little un, my dear."

Ruth had come back and he addressed her, while Ives returned to his own wrongs.

"To throw me over because I told her the truth! She shall live to repent it, anyhow, that I will swear. What would you do, Moleskin, if it had happened to you?"

"I can tell you in a word," answered the poacher. "For that matter it did happen to me —more than once. A girl here and there threw me over—I must confess it; and for that matter I throwed a few of them over too. So that was all fair and square, profit and loss. Then comed a very fine, fat, dear creature called Daisy Blee—one of they Chagford Blees—all dead now but her. A noble piece she was, and would be my wife to-day only for the changes and chances of life. I got misunderstood just about three months afore we was to be married, and the justices took a wrongful view, poor toads—along of reading the game laws without any understanding—and I was sent to Exeter. I suppose they thought I wanted a close time, like the birds and fish. And I got it, and had to rest from my labours all through one winter. And, when I came out, Daisy Blee wouldn't know me. Besides, she was on with the Chagford postman. A good wife she made the man, and I often go in and talk over her girlhood when I'm down that way. No malice on either side. With all my faults, I can say this for myself: I never felt an unkind thought to anything that went in petticoats, and never shall. Here's to 'em all!"

He beamed and blessed the sex; then he took up his gun and patted his bulging pockets.

"Three brace more here as have got to go to Tavistock, so I'd best to be moving," he said.

At this moment, however, Peter Toop appeared.

"Stop, will 'e?" said Peter. "I see the first golden plover be come in. Us'll wet the day, unless you've had enough."

"And thank you, Peter, I'm sure," answered the poacher. "Good birds and fairly plump for after flight. And, as to having enough, that's a state I never allow myself to reach, as you know."

Mr. Toop was bald, but he atoned for this lack by a flowing and handsome beard. The colour of it was grizzled, and his moustache had been stained to a brilliant yellow under his nose by a habit of taking snuff in large quantities. He was rather short, strong, and sturdy. His eyes were bright, his nose was made coarse with snuff and veined with purple. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles, and spoke with great deliberation.

"I be comforting this poor blighted lover here," explained Moleskin, and Mr. Toop showed interest.

"Ah—I've heard about it. 'Tis a very trying thing to be crossed in love, Pomeroy. If it happened to me, I should—I don't know. I should certainly never get over it."

Peter turned his gold-rimmed glasses towards Ruth in a very significant manner, which she failed to observe.

"You be like the caterpillar—haven't got no use for courting," said Mr. Cawker; but Peter Toop would not allow this.

"Plenty of time—plenty of time," he answered.

"Wise men don't rush into it nowadays. They wait for the right partner to come along. You'll see me married yet—if only for my brother's sake."

Moleskin winked at Ives.

"All the same, you mustn't let it go too long. I wouldn't be so rude as to hint at your age, Peter; but we'm none of us growing younger."

"A bald head's often a deception," declared Mr. Toop. "You'll frequently find it along with a young disposition."

He looked at Ruth impressively.

"Now my brother Joel," continued the innkeeper, "though he may look a bit younger than me, is really years and years older—both in mind and body. I'm a regular right-down boy compared to him. But my wife, when I take her, will find me straight as a line and faithful and high-minded—all that I can promise any woman."

"You'm a treasure for somebody—such a lion of vartue as you be!"

"Virtue I have got," admitted Peter. "And a very tender way with the female sex. Always felt a remarkable modesty come over me afore them. Couldn't look at 'em without my eyes watering till I was getting on past twenty year old."

"'Twas my mouth always watered, not my eyes," said Moleskin.

"A great habit of blushing up to the roots of my hair made the hair go—so a barber once told me," continued Peter. "But I feel a wonderful reverence for 'em. A man like you—so gay and free, and deep as the dark in your knowledge of some sort of women—can't understand the high line I take."

Mr. Cawker laughed.

"You take a devilish high line, you do! Such a high line that you've been able to get on very comfortable without 'em, ever since you had no more use for your mother's bosom. A bachelor's an insult to the whole female sex, in my opinion. Now me and Ives here be quite different. Gay and free or not, they'm our life's blood—at least they was. Of course now—the past is past with me. But to hear you—Lord! What a prude you be!"

"Not at all," said Mr. Toop. "I won't have that. A prude is the last thing I am—far from it."

The poacher smiled at his indignation.

"Listen to him now! If that ban't like all the good people—men and women," cried Mr. Cawker. "They ought to rejoice in the name of prude; yet when it comes to the point, no matter how highly proper they be, they all grow angered at it as if 'twas impertinent to call 'em so nice and good and vartuous. This here vartue be a habit of mind, like church-going be a habit of body. But if you tell 'em they be so pure and high-minded, they take it for a left-hand compliment, and would much rather you thought they knowed a bit too, and had had their adventures!"

Mr. Toop shook his head.

"Your opinions was always outrageous, and always will be," he said.

Then Moleskin departed, Peter disappeared, and Ives was left with Ruth Rendle. She made a few timid and sympathetic remarks as to his disappointment; but they did not interest him, and he went his way.

After he had gone Ruth stood quite still for a while, then came to herself and smiled at her own thought. While she looked into young Pomeroy's frowning face, she had been wondering what was the colour of his eyes.

CHAPTER IV

THE BROTHERS TOOP

SOME MYSTERY attached to the brothers Toop. In most affairs of life they were open as the day, and each pursued his dual occupation with energy and success. Peter was a publican and undertaker; Joel shared the duties and profits of the Jolly Huntsmen, while, in addition, he kept pigs and poultry upon an extensive scale. They lived together at the inn, and Joel conducted his operations on the spot. His ducks and geese waddled daily to their haunts in the river; his swine dwelt in styes behind the public-house; but Peter's business was sequestered from the general eye and his shop lay in a corner of Merivale behind the cottages.

The mystery concerned their ages, and upon this subject they differed. Each, when the other was not present, declared himself the younger. Joel openly regretted the growing ravages of time as exhibited upon the person of Peter; and Peter mourned and shook his head to note how fast Joel went down the hill. Between themselves they never discussed the matter; but when apart, each dilated upon the subject and took it for granted that his hearers were with him. In truth they might have been near of an age, and that age fifty-

five or a little more. Peter was bald, Joel had grey hair; Peter was stout and energetic, Joel was thin and active; Peter wore glasses, and Joel needed them not; but against his brother's naked head and short sight, Joel had to set a chronic cough and gouty rheumatism.

And now to their busy lives had come an object of immense significance in the shape of Ruth Rendle. With doubt and fear they invited her to join them, for the prospect of a young woman in the house rendered both uneasy; but Ruth at one-and-twenty proved herself more self-contained and staid than her predecessor of forty, who was now married to an Okehampton greengrocer. Ruth, though a silent girl, proved the soul of sense and prudence. The customers liked her, and, as time went on, her kinsmen both became enamoured of her.

They were men of business and realised what saving of time must result from the courting of a person who lived under their own roof; the disparity of age did not strike them; and for some months neither had the least idea that the other shared his ambition. Both appreciated the obvious advantages accruing to penniless Ruth; each in secret wondered what the other would make of it when he heard the news; and each, with a high opinion of the girl's common sense, felt tolerably hopeful. Joel, however, was far the more sanguine. They kept their secret intentions very carefully to themselves; but since Peter and Joel were both acute and observant men, each presently discovered the situation with respect to his brother; each detected the other in little gallantries and lover-like acts. The position began to be difficult for her, and sometimes in

weak moments, after Joel's methodical attentions had been more than usually arduous, or Peter's warm heart had led him to extravagant lengths, her mind looked round for any possible channel of escape.

In public, and even before Ruth herself, Peter and Joel debated matrimony with good appetite. Marriage was indeed the favourite subject of their leisure, and if one mentioned it, the other was always ready to join the discussion.

There came a Sunday night when both descanted on the glories of the married state as they walked home from church with Mrs. Pomeroy, Mr. Codd, Ruth, and Ives, from Sampford Spiney, a neighbouring village where they worshipped.

Ives and Miss Rendle walked ahead, while Avisa went between the brothers.

"Pull your comforter well about your chest, Joel," said Peter. "The air strikes cold coming out into it."

"Thank you, thank you, Peter," answered the other, swift to scent a challenge. "And you walk gingerly, my dear. This road's a bit rough for your eyes after dark."

"You must soon be thinking of marrying, you two men," declared Mrs. Pomeroy, familiar with their favourite topic.

Both instantly answered, and from the clatter of their voices the slow, determined tones of Peter finally emerged, for Joel began to cough.

"What you say is full of sense as usual. It is time we thought about it—high time. Here's three good money-making things—the hotel, the pig and poultry farm, and—my business, all to be handed down to the next generation."

Joel, knowing that his weaker voice could not

hold its own with Peter's louder and deeper organ, fell back upon Emmanuel Codd. He dropped to the rear out of earshot and pursued the subject, though to no sympathetic listener.

"You see, Codd, as the older man, 'tis for Peter to take the first step, and I'm only waiting for him to do it. Some sensible creature of middle age is what he wants, if he is to marry at all. However, if he don't marry, I must. 'Twill be my task to raise up a few nephews and nieces for Peter, and I really must set about it."

"What d'you want to marry for and get tangled up with women where you ought to be thinking of your graves?—There! Did you see that?"

Mr. Codd broke off suddenly and pointed to a man who passed them in the dim light.

"Good night, Moleskin," said Joel Toop.

"Good night, good night, neighbours," cried Mr. Cawker; then he vanished into the darkness.

"Did you mark what he had under his arm?" asked Codd viciously.

"A cabbage or two, I think."

"Yes—and whose garden did they come out of? To eat a bite he hadn't stolen would be like meat without salt to the rogue."

"You ought to be larger-minded. I don't see that it's much good for you to go to church, Emmanuel Codd, if you can say things like this the minute after. We've just heard a very good sermon on charity, I'm sure, yet the first man you meet with a cabbage, you say he's stole it."

Joel made it clear that he desired no further speech with Mr. Codd. He hastened forward and overtook his brother, who had won a more kindly listener.

"Mrs. Pomeroy here thinks 'tis high time you

turned your thoughts to a wife," said Peter. "For my part, I tell her that you've only got to set the good example, and I shall follow quick after."

"Always such a hopeful disposition—hasn't he?" answered the other cheerfully. "Well, we must begin to think about it seriously. It's no good pretending to less than half a century, whatever we may feel."

"I want for Ruth to come in and have supper with us to-night, if you please," said Mrs. Pomeroy; and Peter saw no objection, but Joel hesitated.

"To be frank, we was going to have a sucking-pig to our meal to-night," he explained. "I'd be sorry for her to miss it."

"A sucking-pig!" said Peter. "First I've heard of it. You'd better come along of us, Mrs. Pomeroy, and join the feast."

"No, no. And I wager that Ruth won't care. We want to have a tell—me and her."

"After all, she would enjoy some of it cold for breakfast quite as well," declared Peter. He took a little secret pleasure in ruining Joel's enterprise; but the other showed annoyance, because a sucking-pig was a great and rare incident.

"Ruth!" shouted Joel. "What do I hear? Mrs. Pomeroy says you ban't coming home to supper—this night of all nights."

"No, cousin Joel. I've promised to bide at Mrs. Pomeroy's, and Ives be going to see me home."

The brothers therefore departed, Peter cheerful and Joel cast down. A cold steak-pie was the supper at Vixen Tor Farm, and after the meal Ruth, speaking privately with Avisa, indicated her difficulties. The elder's attitude lightened her mind not a little.

Avisa's sense of humour kept her soul sweet and served largely to adjust her vision. Now she poured laughter upon Ruth's discomfort until the anxious maiden found herself laughing too, for Mrs. Pomeroy ridiculed the love-making of the brothers.

"'Tis mostly chatter," she said. "They have a weakness, and they want the world to suppose them gay young bachelors on the look-out for wives. Think no more of 'em, and if either of 'em be so silly as to offer marriage, just say 'No' and leave 'em."

"If I do leave 'em, where shall I go?"

"Come to me—while you look round. Don't meet trouble half-way. There's a good husband a lot under fifty years old waiting for you somewhere, Ruth."

"You mean Matthew Northmore?"

"I mean nobody that can't make you love him. Northmore's all right, but not all right for you if you don't care for him. Drop that now. Tell me about Ives. He've spent a lot of time in the Jolly Huntsmen of late, dear chap. Young things talk to young things. I know 'twas so with me when I was young. But youth cleaves to youth. Has Ives said anything that be worth my knowing? I don't ask for curiosity, but only for love. This girl throwing him over has been a hard stroke, and I can't say all he'd like me to say, because I'm right down thankful the girl did change her mind."

"He's not said much, except that he and she were as good as tokened. But the surprising point to me was he should have taken it so much to heart; because three months ago he was not for one maiden, but all. I felt terrible startled

the affectionate way he used to talk about girls in general."

"Why be startled?" asked Mrs. Pomeroy. "I used to like all the boys when I was his age. But he'll do better than Jill, please God. I should dearly wish for to see him married to the right one; but I'm in no hurry. The sort he fancies now be the silly pink and white sort; for I can tell you he's mighty particular. He loves 'em bright, like the bird chooses the cherry. But presently I'm hopeful that he'll see more than skin deep."

"I wish he'd stand to work and not waste all his time," ventured Ruth. "'Tis only because I—I respect him so much that I . . ."

"'Respect' ban't it. His mother will be very quick to respect him when he gives her the chance. Ban't respect makes people so kind to him for all his reckless silliness. 'Tis another word. Life tamed you very quick—worse luck. But don't take life too serious, Ruth. When you want to laugh, mind you do. There's a lot must be well worth laughing at up to the Jolly Huntsmen. And don't you fear to laugh at Ives. Laughter often be a good tonic for an unhappy young man —better'n beer, anyway."

"I shall never laugh at him," said Ruth solemnly.

Then the evening ended and young Pomeroy, at his mother's wish and with no very good grace, saw Ruth over the half-mile of dark moorland that separated the farm of Vixen Tor from Merivale.

Lizzie Pomeroy asked her mother's opinion of Ruth after the girl had gone; but the elder committed herself to few words.

"She's a nice, sensible young woman, in my opinion. Life's made her a thought careful and anxious for her years; but she'll get younger as she gets older, I hope."

"I like her too," declared Lizzie. "If Ives would fall in love with her now, mother!"

"Don't you take to matchmaking at your time of life, my dear."

"But wouldn't she suit him and be just the wife for him?" persisted Lizzie.

"No—not yet," answered Avisa. "If you want the unkind truth, my pretty girl, Ruth is too good for our dear chap at present."

"Mother! I'd never have thought to hear you say that."

Mrs. Pomeroy smiled.

"That's because you don't know much about your own mother yet, Lizzie. That's a joy I'm content to wait for. But 'tis the best that can fall to the lot of some parents: when their children begin to know 'em. Not that it always happens. They tell ''Tis a wise father that knows his own son'; and 'tis a wise daughter that knows her own mother, I dare say."

CHAPTER V

KING TOR

ONE EVENING in early spring Jill Wickett and Samuel Bolt climbed up the hill east of Merivale valley, and ascended those wide and shaggy slopes of wilderness that rise upward to King Tor. Near this elevation great quarries still yield their wealth of granite; while upon the commons beneath appear many evidences of a neolithic people who haunted these uplands when the world was younger. Cairns, parallellitha, ruined lodges, and other aboriginal monuments lay round about; and from King Tor's summit also appeared the winding waters of Walla, dancing over the Moor, sinking to the low lands, and glimmering through the first verdure of spring woods. In the vale, larches spired, and Vixen Tor rose gloomy against the grass slopes at its feet. Jill's eyes rested on the farm beneath the Vixen; then they turned to her lover's cottage standing beside the road that ran, like a white thread, through Merivale.

Jill and Samuel proceeded towards the summit of King Tor, while Mr. Bolt chattered volubly in a thin but cheerful voice. He stood at the threshold of life's romance, and his cup of joy was brimming. So much happiness almost

rendered him incoherent. The woman listened, but showed only a little kindred emotion. The enthusiasm of her companion somewhat wearied her.

Samuel Bolt was full of the future, and now his flood of ideas, together with the steepness of the path, made him pant. Finally he became breathless and stood still to recover. He was a high-shouldered and undersized man with a kind and gentle face. His eyes lacked virile force, and his expression was one of childlike eagerness and trust. A nondescript brown moustache and small flat whiskers adorned his rounded countenance. His cheeks were rather highly coloured and smooth as a baby's. His brow was also unfurrowed. He smiled a great deal, and his laugh rang shrill. His business was to drive a steam roller when roads were being mended round about the neighbouring parishes; and his pleasure was to play a little wooden flute.

Now he coughed and grinned through the water in his eyes.

"Pat me on the back, Jill," he said.

She obeyed, but the smile, with which she answered his, was fleeting and wintry.

"Don't talk no more. Keep your wind for the hill. Us'll hear some more of your great opinions when we get to the top," she answered.

The words indicated very accurately her attitude to her sweetheart, and also revealed something of the maiden's nature. They were almost contemptuous; but she uttered them in a pleasant voice, and they brought no pang to Samuel.

Jill Wickett was a handsome girl, cast in the grand mould. Her hair, of a shade between red

and yellow, like a bright sponge, though a hot and unrestful colour, was of superb abundance. Her eyes matched it; but her eyelashes were pale as straw. Eyes and mouth and a rather thin nose all told of temper. She was freckled, and her skin belonged to that clear order common with light or red women. A great indifference as to attire marked Jill. She trusted to her curious face, fine form, and wonderful hair. Her clothes were poor and untidy. Even in these her courting days she was a slattern. The hem of her old gown had frayed, and beneath it a blue petticoat hung down behind and swept the earth. Her shoes were large, and the right one showed a piece of string in it instead of a lace. Two buttons from the neck of her bodice were gone, and the garment itself gaped half an inch at a seam in the back. She walked with an easy swinging stride, and went up the hill more swiftly than her lover. Indeed, she reached the top of King Tor two minutes before Samuel. Then she chose a comfortable natural seat and reclined amid the boulders; pushed her locks out of her eyes, and looked down at her lover's figure toiling upward. For the first time she noted that his knees were a little bent inward, and the accident added to the physical meanness of his appearance. She frowned and turned her eyes away from him impatiently.

Soon he sat beside her and panted rather hard. She noticed a wheeze in his throat as he took long breaths, and it irritated her.

"How you do puff!" she said in a discontented tone of voice.

"Well I may. We ain't all got your wonderful parts. 'Tis more like a bird going up a hill than

a woman of ten stone to see you," he declared amiably. Then he continued: "Mother said, only back-along Sunday, that to see you in a hurry—why, 'twas like a flying creature, so swift can you travel."

"She never have seen me in a hurry, because I never be in one," answered Jill.

"You be in a hurry to marry me, I hope. Can you believe that 'tis little more than eight months off? Every morning when I wake up I say, 'Thank the watching Lord I'm one day nearer my Jill.'"

"You didn't ought to be so fond. I'm not half what you think me."

"Don't you say that! You'm a thousand times better than anybody knows—even me. Trust mother to tell—such a judge of characters as her. But I do wish you'd button up they front buttons to the neck afore you see her. She's got such an eye for a button."

"You mind your own business. Anyway, my buttons ban't your business. This here dress have shrinked since I washed it. You don't want me to choke myself, I suppose."

He regarded her plump neck with admiration; then he bent over and kissed it.

"Bless your beautiful skin—like rose-leaves. But can't you let the neck out a bit?"

"No," she said shortly. "Ban't worth while. Shan't wear it much longer. I'm making up that last stuff you brought me, and 'twill be ready pretty soon."

He blinked and smiled at her. Then he came closer and put his arm round her waist.

"Could sit like this for evermore," he said.

She was not responsive; but presently a more

gentle expression came into her eyes and she rubbed her ear against his.

"You'm a good chap," she declared. "But I do wish you was shorter and sharper with me, and with your mother too, for that matter."

"What an idea! The two creatures I love best in the whole world. Not very likely. An unkind word from me would kill mother, I reckon. Have you seen her new house now I've hanged the wallpaper in the front parlour?"

"No, I haven't."

"Very nice it looks. She almost shed tears of joy and wonder when 'twas done and I let her come in and see. Honeysuckle is her favourite flower, and I found a paper all crawled over with huge bunches of honeysuckle. Ninepence a piece it cost, yet I couldn't resist it. 'Twas worth anything to see her joy when I took her across to look for the first time."

"When do she go in?"

"By the end of June 'twill be ready."

"Then, when she's gone, you'll set about your own house?"

"Of course. I mean to have it just to a hair as you want it. A few things of mother's, such as blinds and little trifles, I'd wish to keep for memory's sake. Anyway, we can't better 'em. But 'twill be your home, and all must be to your way of thinking. I seed a couple of brave pictures to Tavistock last time I was there—proper painted pictures—one a windmill with the sun setting, and only eighteen shillings, frame and all complete. I want for you to have a few rich fancy things like that in your parlour. Mother's got a surprise for you too. But I mustn't say anything about that. Which reminds me, would

you like some young gillyflowers? I've got a good packet of seed for mother's garden, and I can scatter a bit round our own, if you like 'em."

She did not answer. Her eyes were looking down below upon the farmhouse that shone with white face under the great crags of the Vixen. Samuel followed her glance.

"I had speech with that rash young chap a bit ago. Mother and his mother be old friends, you know. He's felt losing of you cruel, Jill. Never should have thought he could feel so much about anything. Threatenings and slaughters he breathed out against me!"

"What did you say to him?"

"Why, after he'd called me 'dirt,' and 'scum,' and 'the trash of the earth,' and such like, and asked me how I dared come between you and him, I just said to his face that he ought to know better than speak so coarse to a harmless, honest man. I said, 'She've made open free choice betwixt us, and you'm a very mean sort of chap to try to bully me.' I said, 'The thing is done now, and you know her well enough to know she ban't changeable.' With that he answered, and I just marched off and left him."

"And—what!—what did he answer?"

"No matter—'twas a very ungentlemanly way to speak of any female—least of all you."

"I know what he said well enough. He told you I had changed once, and—perhaps would again."

Samuel stared.

"My stars! How did you know that?"

"Because I know him. I know just what he thought and what he said and what he swore when

I took you. Not that I ever was really tokened to him for a second—you know that, Sam."

"My mother figured him up pretty well, I believe. She says he'll never come to good—too light-minded. And he won't be a good husband for any one female, owing to his large liking for 'em all. So my mother says. Now I never felt the call of the female in my nature till I met you, Jill. From being a hopeful and patient man, I growed that fiery and short and fierce, you'd never believe! If I'd been a dog, you'd have said I was going mad. Mother found it out. 'You'm in love,' she said all of a sudden one day."

Jill pursued her own reflections.

"Ives Pomeroy said I should change again—eh? But he thinks wrong as usual. He don't know how to treat a woman—for all he's so mighty fond of 'em. Wanted for me to say I was sorry to him! A likely thing—and him in the wrong, of course."

"Of course he was, I'll warrant. A very wrong-headed chap, most times."

"And no great catch when all's said and done."

"Somehow I can't say hard things against him. 'Twouldn't be Christian, seeing what I've won and he've missed."

"'Twould do him good to be hungry and thirsty a bit," she said.

"For my part, I never could see what the women saw in his face—to say it kindly," declared Samuel. "A hang-dog countenance he've gotten, in my opinion. A sulky look in his eyes and a curly forehead—for all the world like a young bad-tempered bull."

But the girl did not answer this criticism of

Ives Pomeroy. Whatever might be her view of the other's mental peculiarities, his face was good to her. The curly hair, the glance of sulky power, the imperious mien and commanding gesture —all were agreeable. Her nature enjoyed to reflect upon these things, and now it did so, while the placid and genial inanity of Samuel's countenance pointed the mental picture by force of contrast.

"Mother . . ." he began again; then a sudden spark of self flashed up from the unfathomed depths of Jill.

"Do leave your mother alone for a bit, there's a dear. I'm getting a thought weary of your mother—not she herself—but her on your tongue from morning till night. We'm very good friends, and always shall be, I hope. Still, give the subject a rest. Tell about your uncle down to Plymouth for a change."

Mr. Bolt was fluttered and a little alarmed. He withdrew his arm from Jill's waist.

"Tired of mother!" he said. Then he spoke as firmly as he could and tried to blink some fierceness into his mild eyes. "That won't do, Jill. I can't hear you talk like that and suffer it. When once you come to know the wonders of that woman, and especially all she've done for me from my birth up, you'll never be tired of the subject. Anyway, I can tell you this: she's never tired of hearing me tell about you—never."

Samuel's tone rang with reproach, and Jill yawned into his face as she expressed a sort of contrition.

"All right—all right," she answered. "I didn't mean nothing. Your mother and me understand each other very well. She's kindness made alive."

Samuel grew calm again and put his arm around her once more.

"Uncle's no better and no worse," he said.

"Hope to God the man's not going to have a long illness, anyhow. I know what them long illnesses mean only too well. They eat up all the money like a cat laps milk."

"I've sometimes wondered, when he goes, whether you'd like for me to take over his business myself instead of selling it."

"'Twould suit me very well," she answered with awakened interest. She sat up and grew animated.

"I'd love to leave this dreary hole. The shops down to Plymouth would be a godsend."

"Of course mother . . ." he began, then broke off abruptly. "Not that we must count our chickens before they are hatched, however."

"I ban't that sort, I assure 'e," she answered. "Needn't think I'm a hopeful woman—very far from it. I've had everything in my life to make me take the black view, and I always do, and always shall do. But if you've told me truth, your uncle's dying pretty brisk of something inside; and he's got none so near as you, and he's saved three thousand pound, very near, and he's told you the money's to be yours under his will."

"Exactly how it stands," declared Samuel. "And I've been a very good nephew to him so far as I could. I shall be sorry when he goes; but a doctor to Plymouth gives him little more than six months; and when I was last along with the poor man, he said, 'I shan't send you no wedding present, Sam, because, long afore your first child's born, I shall be under the earth and all I have will be yours."

"Do he want to see me?"

"He didn't say so. But I'm very wishful he should. Perhaps we might go down Easter Monday and cheer him up? There's a cheap excursion from Tavistock."

Something moving in the red sunset light upon the heath below attracted Jill's attention.

"Who be they down-along?" she asked.

Samuel screwed up his eyes.

"I see 'em. 'Tis Miss Lizzie Pomeroy and her young man going homeward," he said.

"The schoolmaster from Sampford Spiney?"

"Yes—she've been lucky. He's a learned young chap."

"Wonder what he saw in that little bantam hen?"

"She's small, but a neat, trim maiden. And got her mother's sense—so my mother tells me."

"A little pin-tailed creature. I don't call her a woman—she's no more than a slip of a child."

"There's few with your splendid round shape. A regular queen among 'em you be."

Jill's thoughts were on the schoolmaster. He read the lessons in church sometimes. He was tall and wore fine clothes. She wondered why Lizzie Pomeroy pleased him.

"The big chaps often take little women," Jill said aloud, pursuing her own thoughts. She remembered at the same moment that she stood two inches taller than Samuel.

"Me an' Ives Pomeroy was the same height to a hair," she remarked thoughtfully.

Samuel felt a slow, growing oppression of mind. The general trend of conversation had discouraged him.

"Let's be going," he said. "'Twill be dark afore we reach the road."

Jill rose immediately.

"You can see me as far as the bridge, Sam."

"Ban't you coming back to supper?"

"Not to-night. I'm wanted at home."

His face fell, and she exerted herself a little to cheer him. At the sound of loving words he was soon happy and enthusiastic again. Together they reached Ward Bridge over Walla. Then they climbed the hill beyond, and the moon already began to throw a faint grey light before Samuel kissed Jill fervently, called down the blessing of Heaven upon her, and departed.

She went slowly forward to her home at Sampford Spiney. Then suddenly came a figure in the dark and stopped the way. A man jumped from a broken place in the hedgerow and stood against her. For a moment Jill was alarmed; but when she recognised the intruder upon her peace, fear changed to anger.

CHAPTER VI

A STORMY SUPPER PARTY

IVES POMEROY stood in the middle of the road, and when Jill moved to pass him, he prevented her.

"You've got to speak a word or two to me afore you go on," he said. "I saw you in the valley with that moon-faced fool, and reckoned you'd be coming this way presently."

"I wasn't in the valley with no moon-faced fool. So you can take that back to begin with," she answered. "There's fools of all sorts and all colours."

"Perhaps you'll sit here 'pon this log of wood for a minute and listen to me."

She obeyed. Then she put her chin in her hands and her elbows on her knees.

"Speak what you've got to speak quickly, please," she said. "I can't bide here all night."

"Why for did you throw me over for Samuel Bolt?"

She made a gesture of impatience.

"Don't you know the answer as well as I do?"

"I don't. So perhaps you'll speak."

"The reason is that I don't trust you. There's a deal too much of the Jacky-toad[1] in you for me,

[1] *Jacky-toad* = Will-o'-the-wisp.

and a deal too much pride. Proud as a peacock —Lord knows what for. I don't see that you've got much to be proud of except your face. And that wasn't your making. You don't know how to please a woman. You're a bully; and I won't marry a bully anyway."

"So that's it? I'm not a bully, and very well you know how I treated you. I was as good a lover as ever you be likely to have. Nothing was too hard. I'd have went through fire and water for you, and you know it. But, damn it all, us wants something for our lovemaking. When you wronged me cruel and wouldn't say you were sorry . . ."

"I didn't wrong you cruel."

"You did; and wouldn't say you were sorry. You look in your mind and you'll see a dirty, cowardly, mean piece of work. You'll see a woman who scraped a quarrel with a straight man because she wanted to be rid of him."

"That's a lie. I never wanted to be rid of you till you showed me the truth about yourself. Then I knowed you would be selfish and hard and soon grow sick of me."

"Wanted to be rid of him," repeated Ives. "For why? Because she'd found a chap as owned a cottage and had an uncle as would leave him oceans of money presently."

"How can you dare say that!"

"Because it's true. You think nobody's got any sense or cunning but yourself. You think you can hoodwink everybody. But it takes more than a woman to throw dust in my eyes. Samuel got his old mother to have you to tea when he wasn't there. Then she tells you all his noble qualities and vartues, and how the cottage is his own, and

how his uncle to Plymouth be dying and will leave him a fortune. And then—though you'd never have given the sheep-faced creature a thought afore—you have a row with me and—and . . ."

"Stop!" she said, rising. "If you could think so badly of me as that, I'm thankful I've escaped from you. I didn't throw you over, and you've no right to say I did. 'Tis all the other way, God knows. You ordered me about, and wouldn't say you were sorry. You turned your back on me in the public road, and walked right off and scorned me as if I was dirt. What woman was going to stand that? I'll give everything to the chap I love. I'll pour out my heart and strength and soul for him; but I will have his heart and strength for mine. I want to be happy—it's the longing of my life. I want to be mistress of my home when I've got one, not a downtrodden rag of a woman kept by a man to cook his food and bear his children. You've shown you're a bully and a tyrant to females, so there's an end of it. Now I'll go."

"Go to hell for all I care," answered Ives furiously. "A girl to preach to me as if she was my grandmother! And all lies too. You're marrying a fool for his money; you're marrying a ninny-hammer as you can twist round your finger, and blind and play with and laugh at. See what his love be worth compared to mine."

"I mean to. He don't talk so loud as you, or roll his eyes so much; but he ban't frightened of work, and he understands what a woman wants, and knows how to worship 'em."

"'Worship 'em'!—like a silly dog pawing your gown, I suppose. You know whether he makes love like what I did!"

"Of course nobody can love a woman like you. Anyway, you've had enough practice. The woman that'll make you happy's a worm, as'll do nought but crawl and cringe and tell you what a grand person you are."

"Talk—talk—and all to try and hurt me, you spiteful toad! Just because I didn't give you a new gown to go to church in!"

She passed him and walked rapidly away.

"You'll wish your cake was dough again yet!" he shouted after her; but she let him have the last word, and he was far the angrier of the two when they parted. A last oath he hurled into the darkness after Jill; then he returned home and burst stormily upon the supper party assembled there.

"I've had it out with her," he began. "'Twas just as I thought. I told her straight why she'd taken Samuel Bolt—because he'd got a rich uncle going to die. She couldn't deny it, but talked a lot of drivel about my temper. However, I've given her a proper dose of the truth to-night; and I've got to say a word to Bolt too. Then I wash my hands of the blasted pair of 'em for evermore."

A visitor sat at the board and he looked somewhat uneasy before this storm. Arthur Brown, the schoolmaster of Sampford Spiney, who had recently taken a walk with Lizzie Pomeroy, was a man of three-and-thirty. He had been educated in London, and he knew the elements of most branches of learning except human nature. Lizzie had wakened interest in his heart by reason of her wonderful neatness; by her manners in church, where she sang in the choir, and by her shyness. He prospered with shy women best.

Those who were not shy awakened that emotion in him.

Arthur Brown was sententious, sensible, careful of his money, and ignorant of the world. He disliked Ives Pomeroy cordially, and had secret hopes that after marriage he would be promoted to some school nearer a city and pursue life a good deal farther from his wife's family. He cared not for the country except as a theatre for field botany. When he walked abroad his eyes were always on the earth, or in the hedge. He never lifted them excepting at public worship. He was a man who found it easy to be correct, honest, and upright; and he had a natural instinct to dispense his opinions. Lizzie loved him, considered him the wisest spirit that the world had shown to her, and wished a thousand times a day that her brother was more like him.

Now, as Ives rattled on, Mrs. Pomeroy nodded gently, with that characteristic inclination of the head which often answered for speech with her and took the place of much more than mere affirmative. Then her boy fell moodily upon his supper, and Arthur Brown, who usually showed uneasiness when Lizzie's brother was present, endeavoured to change the subject.

"Can I do anything in London for you, Mrs. Pomeroy?" he asked Avisa. "I am going up for two days in the Easter holiday. There is a meeting I want to attend, and it will just fit in. We of the educational world are beginning to . . ."

Ives interrupted him.

"I said to her, in plain words, that she might go to hell in her green dress for all I cared, and Bolt along with her. And I also said . . ."

"Hush, my dear. Arthur be talking," answered his mother.

"Talking—what's the use of talking?"

"There's nought you can do in London for me, but I hope you'll enjoy it—being born to the manner of cities," said Avisa.

"Thank you—thank you. It rubs off the rust, Mrs. Pomeroy. The School Union is a great organisation. There's a lot in method—when one is teaching. I myself have made experiments on the young mind during the last five years. We do too much by rote and not enough by sense. The thing is first to train the budding natural instincts. We begin at the wrong end, in fact."

Mrs. Pomeroy smiled.

"You're right. 'Tis a fault of the age, my dear. They beginned at the other end—with a birch—in my young days. And I do think the old generation of men was quite as wise and a lot tougher than the chaps you be turning out."

"Corporal punishment! No, no."

"Be you going to get Lizzie her tokening ring when you'm in London?" asked Ives, like a pistol shot. "Because 'tis about time she had it."

Mr. Brown was disturbed.

"Certainly I am," he said. "Don't think that my delay meant any disrespect to your sister. Very far from that. But we both attached little importance to an outward and visible sign of—of the inward and spiritual compact."

"All the same, there's a right way and a wrong way of courting, and she ought to have it—oughtn't she, mother?"

"She's going to have it," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"And I may say it will be of considerable

value," added Arthur Brown. "It happens that a fellow-schoolmaster of mine has a brother who is a jeweller. He is called Mr. Harold Wilkinson, and he is in a pretty rising way of business in the Tottenham Court Road. I shall go to him for Lizzie's ring; and, on Thursday week, the fifteenth day of May, that ring will, God willing, be upon Lizzie's finger; and I hope it will become an heirloom in the family."

Old Mrs. Pomeroy retired immediately after the meal; the lovers spent an hour in the parlour alone, before Arthur returned to his lodgings at Sampford Spiney; there remained at the table Mr. Codd, his mistress, and Ives.

Then Emmanuel went out and Avisa was left with her son. He sat by the fire and presently took his pipe out of his pocket. His mother cleared the table.

"Are you better to-night?" he asked presently.

"Yes, dear—quite the thing again. 'Twas nought."

He smoked for five minutes and she waited for him, knowing that he must storm a while longer before peace came. Then his torment of mind burst forth again. He swore and flung his clay pipe upon the hearth so that it broke into many pieces.

"I wish to God you wouldn't be so deadly calm, mother! Don't you know my blood's boiling in me at this damned trick? Can't you feel a bit? Can't you . . .?"

"Young blood should boil," she said. "Only don't let it boil over. There's none long for your steadfast, settled happiness like I do. But such things as be steadfast and settled and sure don't come to the likes of you at your time of life.

There's no sight of land for you yet, Ives—only the wild sea, I reckon; and your lighthouse the stars."

"Everybody be against me—even her. Show 'em money and out comes the naked truth about 'em! I hate the whole pack of 'em now. Never again will I have ought to do with 'em. You be the only one of 'em worth a damn."

She laughed.

"Bless your curly, silly head! Wait a bit; go to work—'tis the best balm of life and the only thing you can trust to stand between you and misery. Work and you'll come back to yourself again presently. Oak-rinding will begin after Easter, you know—not ours, but the neighbours'. You can always have as much as you please for the asking, and you like it. I'm hopeful you'll put a lot of time into it, Ives."

"'Oak-rinding'?"

"Stripping bark be good tonic work, your father used to say. Try toil that'll bring you home dead beat and ready for nought but bed. Show the chaps what you can do. Nobody knows but me, Ives. A good few men round about here doubt if you can stand to work at all—Matthew Northmore, for one. Show 'em what you can do."

"Northmore! I could tie the man in a knot. Look at my arms alongside his. All the same, 'tis only human I should smart for this. All my hopes dashed, and—and 'tis a very cruel thing, mother, when you think you've found your life's partner to find her a greedy, lying minx like that."

"So 'tis, then. Seek a woman to make you a wise man—not a happy one. Though happiness and wisdom ought to be the same, I suppose."

Ives broke off suddenly. His waning tribulation turned upon others and he declared a new grievance.

"If that man don't bring Lizzie back a proper ring from London, I'll have a row with him."

"Better you let 'em go their own way. They understand one another very well."

"Call that love! He's too close-fisted to be any good at loving. Does he ever kiss her? Blessed if I think he does. If you went in the parlour now suddenly, you'd see 'em sitting six feet apart talking about education!"

"We ban't all built of your clay—a fortunate thing too."

"I lay you didn't go courting that way, mother."

CHAPTER VII

THE SPORTSMEN

JUST BEFORE EASTER the weather turned very cold, the wind settled in the north, and snow showers swept the Moor. There came an evening when it snowed heavily for an hour. After dark more snow fell, and when day dawned Ives Pomeroy looked out from his window at five o'clock upon the return of winter. But the sun soon rolled up behind King Tor, pierced the sulky fog-banks that hung low upon the waste, and woke them to a dazzling glory of gold. The snow began to glitter and run. It swiftly vanished from the snug southern-facing places, and was already melting upon the Moor when young Pomeroy, with his fishing-rod and creel, started up the river.

By appointment under Great Mis Tor he met Moleskin, and the two tramped some miles onward, where Walla runs small and is little fished. It was the elder sportsman's custom only to seek those remote streams beyond the attention of common anglers.

"A nice bit of colour in the water," he declared, as they set up their rods; "a worm will find 'em to-day."

He discoursed of sport.

"Peel be running already lower down," he said. "I reckon there's a very fair summer of fishing afore us. 'Tis not to be named, in my opinion, alongside of shooting; but a man must be busy, and if the trout only ran heavier, they'd be useful to market."

Presently they parted. Moleskin began fishing, and Ives went upstream half a mile before he wetted his line.

Mr. Cawker was a past master in the delicate art of angling with Stewart tackle and a worm. He wasted little time, and his knowledge enabled him to choose the right water. The river was slightly coloured, but he took no risks and kept as carefully out of sight as though Walla ran crystal clear and at summer lowness. The trout were moving, but this fisherman had no need of fingerlings, and for some time he disengaged each victim and restored it to the river. Then came something heavier, and where the water fell over a ledge of stone, boiled in a granite pot beneath and then bubbled away over a second fall, he hooked a better fish. It made one grand run and rush, and then came to Mr. Cawker's hat. He carried no net, but wore a withered wide-awake with a hole the size of a penny in the crown. Dozens of good trout had been landed in it; and now a half-pounder twisted and bounded on the bank. Its olive and silver, flecked with ebony and scarlet, pleased Moleskin. He beamed upon it, broke its neck, and baited his hooks again.

Success attended his sport, and when, two hours later, he met Ives, the younger man was also in good temper. He had by no means succeeded to the same extent, for he lacked the patience and the rare skill of the poacher; but he

had killed a pound trout, and this enabled him to view Moleskin's two dozen respectable fish without envy.

They sat together in the sun, ate their sandwiches, and talked of fur, feathers, and fins.

"There's a baggering otter up the river," said Moleskin.

"I see the marks of him, and I do hope as the otter hounds will be this way early in this season, for the sooner he's killed the better for sport."

"He'll work downstream after the big fish."

"May or may not. I be going to try down-along, between nine and ten o'clock, in Squire Serpell's water at Oaktown some evening soon."

"You'll get catched in Oaktown woods, sure as death, Moleskin, afore you've done with it."

"Not me. At my time of life woods is safest. More like to get catched in the open. But I know all about Serpell's water as well as his coverts. I've spent seven hours in holes under the banks up to my knees in the river, and men all round hunting and swearing. 'Tis what I know saves me at a pinch. Not one of Serpell's keepers has my close understanding of the place. I'll tell you another thing worth hearing; they hope the head of game down there this year be going to beat anything ever they've yet done. Hundreds and hundreds of eggs is bought, so Billy Westover tells me—the under-keeper that old Gregory got sacked last year. There'll be some splendid sport for the gentlemen this fall. You know my opinions on that subject."

"I'm the same," declared Ives. "Serpell's a hard, grasping old devil, and sweats all his people cruel at his tailor's shop in Plymouth."

"Certainly he does. Such men ought to pay

toll to the workers—men like us, who live by the sweat of the brow. For my part, I'm a free-trader to the backbone, and all for liberty in these matters. I hate a selfish man. Large, generous vices, such as drinking and love and such-like, I don't object to; because nature's responsible for 'em, and them as work hard have got to be thirsty. But as to hoarding money, and making other folk toil to keep you in idleness, and grinding the face of the poor—why, my gorge rises at it."

"I'm the same," declared Ives. "I hate the quality, as we call 'em—a damned bad quality most times, if you ax me."

"Capital! You never said a truer word. Well, in the fall of the year I may mention Oak-town pheasants to you again. Ban't my way to count my chickens afore they are hatched, let alone another person's; but since you'm the only chap in these parts with a head on his shoulders and right principles . . ."

"You can trust me, Moleskin."

"I know it. Wish there was more like you."

They talked a little longer; then appeared a figure on horseback, and Matthew Northmore approached them.

"Now, there's a very different fashion of chap to what you be," said Moleskin. "Stiff and starched, and narrow as the grave. A regular right-down Tory, him. Why for? For the most foolish reason possible. Because his father was afore him!"

"My father was a Tory too, for that matter."

"Exactly; but you ban't. Because you've got a larger build of mind and better education. You and me think for ourselves; this here horseman lets the dead do all his thinking for him."

Matthew Northmore rode alongside of them. He liked neither fisherman, and was passing with a slight nod when Moleskin stopped him.

"We were just saying what a pity 'twas Bellivor Hunt Week gave such bad sport this year, Mr. Northmore. A good company, and none better mounted than you on that wonnerful bright bay. Why, a meet this side of Moreton wouldn't be a meet if you wasn't there 'pon that hoss. But certainly the harriers have had very poor speed of late. Where be the hares got to these last few seasons?"

Northmore pulled up, stroked his pale beard, and looked very coldly at his questioner.

"Like your cheek to ask. Yes, sport was bad; and, since you begin it, I'll tell you this: you are more likely to know the reason than most people."

He showed anger and irritation. The growing scarcity of hares on Dartmoor was a sore subject with Matthew.

"Well, I never!" cried Mr. Cawker. "You sportsmen do let your minds run away with you terrible! As much as to say I knowed what becomes of the hares."

"How does it happen that Tavistock Market's always got hares in season, and yet every harrier pack tells the same story?"

"Them hares to Tavistock come from Belgium."

"You know better, and so do the poulterers. They come from Dartmoor."

"Then you and your friends ought to look sharper," declared Ives. "No use grumbling and libelling people if you can't prove nothing."

Northmore flashed a hard glance at him.

"You're young," he said. "Too young to take good advice, I'm afraid, though I know you

pride yourself on a lot of wide knowledge. But you offered me some advice last time we met at the Jolly Huntsmen, and I'll give you a little in exchange for yours. A man is known by the company he keeps."

"What then? Who be you to judge? I'd sooner be seen with an honest free-trader than a whey-faced, narrow-minded chap like you. Sport, indeed! You and a few others round about seem to think that hares and birds and fish, and everything on God's earth, was only made for you to hunt and shoot and catch. You'll learn different some day. And if I choose to shoot Dartmoor hares, I shall. That's not poaching, anyway."

"There's no such thing as poaching," declared Moleskin. "'Tis just a silly word invented by the rich against the poor. Sport be sport. Besides, 'twill be time enough to talk when any man catches me out in it."

"They'll catch you presently—the sooner the better," said Northmore harshly. "You're a blackguard, and you know you are. And if I ever get the chance to help 'em catch you—or any of the young men you lead wrong—I shall."

"You Christian men!" cried Moleskin. "And a sportsman too! Just to show you the difference betwixt us, I was coming to you only to-morrow to offer to do you a good turn."

"Then don't. I won't have you at Stone Park."

"Charity, charity, where's your charity, hare-hunter? I was coming—what for, d'you suppose? To offer to trap your rabbits. All free, gratis, and for nothing. Up over at dawn a bit back-along, I saw the rabbits on your grass in hundreds of dozens. 'That poor man!' I said. 'Little

does he know how they vermin be treating him while he lies in bed of a morning sleeping the sleep of the just!' But if you order me off, well, you must look to it yourself, neighbour."

"'Hundreds of dozens'! I've hardly got a rabbit in my grounds now." Moleskin smiled.

"Then no doubt they was monkeys, or perhaps kangaroos. My eyesight ban't what it used to be, worse luck. Still, I thought I knowed a rabbit from a sheep."

"Come on, Cawker," said Ives. "Us don't want to be talking here all night."

"Will 'e buy a few good trout, Mr. Northmore?" asked Moleskin, changing the subject and showing the contents of a battered creel.

"Poached too," answered Matthew. "For 'tis poaching, as I always hold, to use natural bait on these streams. A paltry thing. Artificial fly ought to be the law."

"Caught with 'the gardener's fly' all quite correct and regular," said Moleskin. "You won't take a couple of pound of 'em?"

"You'll call it poaching to breathe the air next," cried Pomeroy. "Such a narrow-minded man never comed on the Moor yet! Threatening your betters—all because your blasted hounds can't catch hares!"

"A fool and his folly are never parted," answered the other. "If it wasn't so, I'd take the trouble to talk to you; but you'll need a smart lesson or two before you're a decent member of society; and I hope the smart lessons will come along."

"Go to hell!" shouted Ives in a rage. "You dare to preach to me! And mind this: never you interfere with me or there'll be trouble."

But Northmore had ridden away and he did not answer these promises.

Moleskin laughed, brought a box of brandlings from his inner pocket, and began to bait his hooks anew.

"Wise in his own conceit, that long-faced chap," he said. "He'm in love—that's the naked truth; and the state often makes a man as vicious as a trapped rat—specially when it ban't going right. If Ruth Rendle took him, you'd find he'd have a large mind about life in general very quick and forgive everybody. As things are, he's nasty. Calls himself a sportsman! Lord pardon him, he don't know the meaning of the word."

Moleskin winked the eye with a fallen lid; then lighted a pipe and proceeded with his fishing. But Ives found himself in no condition to resume the pastime. His temper called for more active physical operations; therefore he put up his rod and set off to walk swiftly homeward. One consolation softened his fiery mood: his mother would have a pound trout for her supper.

CHAPTER VIII

BUDDING OF THE LARCHES

THE HAMLET of Merivale boasted no place of worship, but Sampford Spiney's crocketed church-towers were visible in the distance; and when the rainy wind blew, thin bell-music filtered up Walla valley on the seventh day, and certain of the people would answer that summons.

From Vixen Tor, Avisa and her children set out on Easter Sunday. The women carried flowers. Scattered upon the road behind them, other folk followed. Ruth Rendle walked between the brothers Toop, and Matthew Northmore came alone a quarter of a mile in the rear.

Against the tower of the unnamed church bursting beech-buds spattered their newborn green; round about were lifted the boles of many trees; and spring moved amid the sleeping-places beneath. Primroses peeped from the mounds where children had planted them, and the wood-sorrel drooped its frail bells above much dust of vanished men.

The gravestone of Ives Pomeroy's father stood to the north of the church tower. It was of slate, deeply incised; and room remained upon it to record his wife's passing when she would sink to lie with him. The dead man's favourite text

was also graven here by his command—part of Isaiah l. 2:

"*Is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?*"

Lizzie arranged the flowers, and Ives, at his mother's direction, drew a dandelion from its roothold on the grave. Many other little companies also brought their gifts and arranged them in tin crosses and jam-pots. Some wore holiday colours and went cheerfully about their tender task; others were clad in black and laid their flowers silently on recent mounds. The bells rang their loudest; the sun shone; a little knot of men in black stood near the porch to watch the congregation enter.

"I'm not going in to-day, mother," said Ives suddenly.

Avisa nodded her head.

"Walk back-along through the in-country and see what's doing, and—perhaps you'll come to evening service with me."

He hesitated, for he knew that it would be good to her to have him beside her in church. An instinct to please her kept him dawdling about the churchyard after Avisa had entered; then he shook himself impatiently and strode off down the deep lanes to the river.

Lizzie and Arthur Brown sat together in church near Mrs. Pomeroy. They whispered and shook their heads at the conduct of Ives. To the schoolmaster it seemed a very serious defection on such a day—almost equivalent to a denial of faith. The young people were more concerned about it than the mother, and Lizzie found her joy at the service clouded.

Meantime Ives hung over Ward Bridge, lighted

his pipe and smoked in gloom. Before him Walla's waters foamed under a haze of grey twigs and drooping branches. Spring had fondled the trees, and they were full of the mellow light of opening buds. The river ran clear and flashed a salute to each moss-clad stone upon her way. She twinkled into foam at many falls; she loitered in backwaters and little bays; she smoothed her face to stillness, that young stars and buds and delicious things bursting their sheaths might bend and see their own loveliness. The oaks were giving out an amber light under the sunshine; the alders opened tiny trim fans of green; the great woodrush and water parsnip sprawled with their feet in the river; and kingcups, cuckoo-flowers, and the foliage of the iris brightened the water-meadows. Aloft, along deep hillsides under Vixen Tor, countless pavilions of the larch were glittering in their first rapture of young green. Each spire of all these myriad spires preserved a gracious individual distinction in the commonwealth; perhaps not one would have been missed; yet not one could have been spared from that emerald mantle here flung upon the shoulders of Spring. Light dwelt in them as in its proper home; and beneath them ran the river and spread fields that echoed with the music of lambs.

Young Pomeroy found his mind presently turn to peace. Mundane matters unconsciously interested him a little. For the larches he had no eyes; but he watched a trout feeding beneath him; then he sought the other parapet of the bridge, looked downstream and marked the great Oaktown coverts of laurel and rhododendron that here spread dark and shining under the russet and grey of the trees. Deep within these under-

woods lay the pheasants' quarters. Many poor men worked in the forest all the year round; a few rich ones took their pleasure there for a month or two, when the shooting season came; and a still more limited number—the tribe of Moleskin—robbed therein and combined business with their pleasure.

A certain ferocity of spirit made Ives court rather than ignore his kind on this rare spring morning. Presently he left the bridge, broke bounds by climbing through the woods above it, and anon reached the road under the Moor, along which his mother and the Merivale people would presently return from church to their homes. He sat on a great stone that overhung the way, and stared indifferently at the passers-by. Only when Jill Wickett in her green dress and Samuel Bolt appeared did he show interest. Spring had no match for the peculiar shade of verdancy that Jill wore; but, none the less, she looked very handsome, and her beauty survived the ordeal of her gown. Sammy flushed as he caught sight of the man on the rock above him.

"There's that chap!" he whispered. "Come a bit quicker, an' look t'other way!"

But his sweetheart obeyed neither direction. She shook her skirts, slowed her gait, and deliberately stared into the frowning face of young Pomeroy. Their eyes met for some seconds and his flashed furious, while hers affected indifference. Ives had time to sneer in the direction of Samuel Bolt and shrug his shoulders. He saw her lips tighten and found himself in a better temper after they had passed. As they retreated he heard the murmur of their voices.

"'Tis like a red rat marrying a white mouse!"

he said to himself. "Anyway, I wish 'em both in hell for it; and he'll get hell, if she don't."

Lizzie and the schoolmaster next passed. His sister looked mournfully up at Ives. Then he dropped a lump of moss on Mr. Brown's shining, chimney-pot hat, much to the owner's annoyance.

"You ought to know better, Ives—such monkey tricks—Easter Sunday and all," said the other man, as he took off his hat and cleaned its crown.

"And you ought to know better than wear a silly thing like that on your head—Sunday or no Sunday," shouted his future brother-in-law as Lizzie and her betrothed went on.

Then Peter Toop appeared with Matthew Northmore. The farmer ignored Ives, but Mr. Toop improved the occasion. His brother and others from Merivale followed; then came Ruth Rendle alone. To her Ives condescended to give 'good-morning.' She answered cheerfully and told him that she was coming to drink tea with his mother. As she went on her way, Ives regarded her slight figure and contrasted Ruth with Jill, to the latter's advantage.

Then he saw his mother coming with old Rachel Bolt, and he descended and met them. They moved slowly, for the elder woman was lame with rheumatism. But she prattled cheerfully of the future according to her custom, and Avisa listened.

"Come autumn he takes her, and I'm wishful to have a little fuss about it, for never was a more popular man in Merivale than my Sam. His house be too small for a party, and even with mine, t'other side of the way, we couldn't manage very vitty; but down to the Jolly Huntsmen it

can be done, and the Toops be going to arrange the spread."

This much Ives heard, and flashing lightnings on the grey head of Mrs. Bolt, he departed and reached home some time before his mother.

He blamed her bitterly when she returned for listening to these details; he also let it be known that he should quarrel with any member of the family who went to the wedding; then he became calmer, and made a good meal.

"Is there ought between you and Matthew Northmore?" Avisa said to him presently. "I've asked him to drop in this afternoon, for I like the man very well, but, when I put it to him, he said as he didn't think you'd care about it."

"I don't care one way or t'other," answered her son. "Northmore's not my sort. For that matter, none of the people you like ever be my sort; but I go my way, and seek the kind that understand me—them that don't waste their time in preaching or pulling long faces. They fox-hunters—what they do is always right; but if another man has his own ideas about sport, then of course he's wrong, and sure to go to the devil. However, he's welcome here if you like him."

"I don't know whether he'll come. But he's a very good man, and so was his father before him," she answered.

"Be you well enough for the tea-party, mother?" asked Lizzie, and Mrs. Pomeroy assured her that she was.

Now Matthew Northmore had not intended to accept the invitation, but that happened which changed his mind. He heard that Ruth was to drink tea with the Pomeroys, and the possibility of walking back to Merivale with her decided him.

He appeared therefore at Vixen Tor and behaved graciously when Ives entered the parlour and took his place at the tea-table.

Conversation was general and of local matters. But presently old Jane Pomeroy beckoned to Ruth and they talked aside together, while Avisa had speech with the master of Stone Park. Lizzie and her sweetheart looked at a family album of photographs together, and Ives left the company. Then, when the young man was gone, Mrs. Pomeroy discussed her son and warned Northmore to be charitable in his judgments.

"I'd judge no child of yours unkindly," he answered. "But we've got to rate a man by his friends, not by his mother. I'm not his keeper, but I'm not his friend neither. For the reason that he wouldn't let me be. He's said a good few very rude things to me . . ."

Northmore broke off and looked towards Ruth Rendle.

"My son is in a bad way still, along of Wickett's daughter. She chose a more restful pattern of man."

"Who shall blame her?"

"Nobody. Only if you knew what he feels . . ."

Matthew admitted that at such a time any man must be gently dealt with.

"Perhaps I've been too short and taken the rude things he said too serious. We must allow for a lot where a man's smarting under that. If he'd only work, however! 'Tis a very sad and dangerous thing to waste such a lot of his precious hours."

"So I say," chimed in the schoolmaster. "It's not only sad and dangerous; it's wrong to

the world at large. I've thought out most economic questions for myself, I may tell you. To waste time is to rob the community. The man who wastes time is a thief, if you look at it right. In my classes I punish laziness as sharply as it is possible."

"'Tis a great blessing to be fond of work," admitted the mother, "but some of the best men I've known in the world hated it; and some of the pleasantest folk ever I've met with didn't stand to work more than they could help."

"I despise a man who doesn't, all the same," declared Northmore, and Arthur Brown agreed with him. All seemed astonished that Mrs. Pomeroy could view this alarming trait in her son so leniently.

"You of all people—such a worker as you are, mother!" exclaimed Lizzie.

"I'm quick to my work, but not specially fond of doing it," confessed Avisa. "There be some love to mess along all day and make martyrs of theirselves and never be done. And they get the credit of being terrible hard-working, instead of only terrible slow-working. My husband larned me that. He used time like a master. Ives be so quick as a bird building her nest when he takes a task in hand serious."

"Wish you could keep him off that bad old man Cawker," said Northmore. "It won't come to good."

"I wish I could with all my heart. I'm quite with you there."

"It wouldn't be at all an unlikely thing if that Moleskin, as they call him, was caught red-handed and sent to prison some day," declared the schoolmaster.

"Too old—too old for such crooked ways—nearly twenty-five, they tell me. 'Tis an age when he ought to take a graver view of life," continued Northmore.

Mrs. Pomeroy listened patiently; then she rose and went to the women by the fire.

"Another cup of tea, mother?" she asked; but Jane did not immediately answer. She was talking very earnestly with Ruth. Now she broke off and addressed Avisa.

"I doubt you won't be interested, my dear. Ruth and me was having a bit of a tell about the next world, but I always say you'm so wrapped up in this one, that you don't think enough 'pon the next. Now I be different, and at my age 'tis right I should be. 'Tis my boast that I live with the Book in reach and never let the sun go down without having read one chapter in the Old Testament and one chapter in the New. Year in, year out, I do it."

"Bless your heart, yes, you do. If we all knowed the Word like you, mother!"

"Yet it ban't all so clear as I could wish, for all my reading," confessed Jane Pomeroy.

"Puzzles there always will be. No two Christians can read the Book quite alike," said Avisa. "Maybe that's part of the wonder of it."

"Just so," declared the ancient woman. "Ruth here—for my comfort—was saying as there would be no grey hairs in heaven; but I hope she'm quite mistaken there. Think of me, at my time of life, in a gay place full of nought but hopeful young folk as never grow tired and never want rest."

"But you'll be young again yourself, my old dear!" declared Ruth.

"Nay, nay, missy. I'd much rather not. Avisa here, as be on the way too, will bear me out in that. Us have had our springtime and don't hanker for another. Us have had what no heaven can give us again—to say it humbly—haven't us, Avisa?"

"Yes, we have," admitted the other. "Heaven's self can't do all that earth can. For why? We shall be changed."

"Heaven's self won't come up to my courting days with Thomas Pomeroy," declared old Jane. "I don't expect it, and I don't ax it. I'd wish for me and him to be on the edge of age there—old like without aches and ills—old without sleepless nights and sad thoughts about them in their graves—just old and peaceful and together in some quiet corner. And no trouble to nobody; and the childer to look in from time to time with the news of their childer. I pray it can be done; but time will show."

Later that evening Northmore had his desire and left Vixen Tor beside the woman he loved. Mrs. Pomeroy saw him depart and watched the pair thoughtfully upon their road. Then came the happiest moment of her day.

Ives appeared.

"Be I to go to evening prayer along with you, mother?" he asked.

"I'll get my bonnet," she said. "'Tis time we was starting."

Her son's mood had changed.

"Did you see the fashion Northmore looked at Ruth Rendle when she was drinking her tea?" he asked.

"Yes, Ives."

"He'll never court a girl right—ban't built to do it. Another thing: she don't care a brass button for the chap."

"A very good, high-principled man."

"Of course—everybody is—but me and Moleskin. He may be all you say; but he's dry as a dead bone. For that matter, I don't see much in Ruth Rendle myself."

"I do. You're so fond of the girls, that I wonder you don't."

"A regular old maid, I believe."

"Don't you think it! They'm only like old maids where they'm not interested. I could be frosty myself at her age—frost in the morning and fire in the afternoon."

He laughed.

"As to Ruth, she's the best wife hid in a maiden as I've met this many a year. She's patient, she's brave, she's got a heart. That's to say a lot for a young creature."

"Don't seem young to me," he declared. "Always appears awful old and awful slow to see a joke."

"Mend your jokes, then," said Mrs. Pomeroy. "The fault's more like to be in them than in her."

CHAPTER IX

A WEDDING

WALLA RISES in the high Moor near Tavy Head by Cut Hill. It is a region very remote, and she has travelled many miles before any sign of civilisation can be seen upon her banks; then, in scattered colonies, the ruined homes of vanished men appear beside her, and lower still, under the eastward sweep of Great Staple Tor, stands a human dwelling of to-day.

Stone Park, the farm of Matthew Northmore, was surrounded by grassland reclaimed from the waste; but at this season the cattle were afield until winter, the hay meadows were shorn, there was little work upon the land. Northmore did not cultivate anything but hay. His other necessary winter crops he purchased from his neighbours of the 'in-country.' Leisure therefore often fell to him, and on a day in autumn he prepared to leave his farm that he might spend certain hours in the company of his kind.

The man's romance stood still from one point of view, though, since fire cannot remain stationary, in a vital particular the first object of his heart lived by what it fed on and kept him burning. Thrice he had reached the moment of declaration to find himself tongue-tied. This paralysis of

will was based upon external knowledge rather than upon inherent character. But for one fact he had not thus delayed, or proved so fearful before the necessary ordeal. It was Ruth Rendle's attitude towards him that arrested action. A man always unduly sensitive, his intuition told him clearly that he had not yet won her. She was gracious, attentive, and kind; but with a grace, attention, and friendship that she denied to none. Between them there existed none of that secret understanding over trifles, none of those little private jests or special interchanges of thought that his instinct told him should ere now have arisen.

He was entirely outside her life. He felt that had she reciprocated in any degree his fervour, had she found in him a kindred spirit, their relations must unconsciously have ripened, until a final declaration of love came as the sure fruit of the flower of friendship. But no such thing happened. She was to him as she had been when first she stood behind the bar of the Jolly Huntsmen; and this knowledge produced infirmity of purpose in him and kept him dumb against his native inclination to speak and be answered. He told himself that he was a coward; he strove to find out the reason, if any existed, why she did not grow a little more tender and confiding; and first he blamed himself, and then, as a thing easier to do but not the less distracting, he blamed another. With observation immensely sharpened by his condition, he watched Ruth's attitude to the rest of the world. On her stage behind the counter he marked her play her part, and noted small circumstances, trivial turns of neck, intonations of voice, glances of eye. First he was relieved to discover—nothing. Then he

was thrown into the extremity of anger and of grief; because he pierced her secret, as a skilled physician pierces the secret of the patient, or a swift-eyed boy marks the nest and renders the bird's inherited system of concealment futile before superior intelligence. None but Matthew Northmore guessed that this woman hid secret love for a man; and he by the light of his own heart discovered this fact.

Now, on the day when Samuel Bolt married Jill Wickett, the farmer at last reached a condition of exasperation and concern that demanded settlement. His whole existence craved to hear the truth. He felt that he must starve if the definite word was longer withheld, and he decided that before the week was ended he would ask Ruth to marry him.

Five-and-forty people attended the marriage ceremony at Sampford Spiney, and seventeen subsequently appeared at Merivale, where the Toops had arranged a wedding meal.

Much to the anger of Ives Pomeroy, his mother accepted an invitation, and Avisa's place at the banquet was on the right hand of Rachel Bolt. In addition to the married couple there also appeared Ruth Rendle, Matthew Northmore, one James Bonus, who acted as best man, Emmanuel Codd, and other friends and relations, including the parents and the young brothers and sisters of the bride.

Peter and Joel Toop waited upon their guests. They performed this duty at all occasions of an entertainment in the Jolly Huntsmen; but to-day they marked their equality with those they served by a free interchange of raillery and conversation with the assembled company.

"How his manly voice uttered the words!" said Rachel. "The ring once belonged to Sam's gossip—old Sally Slatter. 'Twas left to him under her will when she died, with a hope that he'd wed his wife with it. And so he did; but he put on the new one as he'd bought hisself so soon as all was over. Didn't her look fine coming down the aisle after the signing? But I'm sorry to say Sam let fall a terrible gert blot in the church book just following his name. Won't stand for bad luck, I hope."

"The service went very suent," [1] declared Avisa. "As orderly and pleasant a wedding as ever I was at."

"She'll be a real daughter to me. They'm off to Exeter for the honeymoon. Samuel isn't the man to spoil such a thing for a pound or two. And I be going to get the house all ship-shape against they come home."

"Don't do too much. 'Twill only be a challenge to her to undo it again. These young creatures have their own opinions, and they're almost always different from ours."

Peter Toop paid special attention to the bride. He revolved round her as though she were an idol and he a worshipper. Port and sherry from the cellar of the Jolly Huntsmen flowed freely, and presently Peter reached Avisa.

"Have half a glass more, Mrs. Pomeroy," he urged.

"I'll have a whole glass," she said. "'Tis old as the hills, I'll wager."

"A beautiful rich and feeding wine," admitted Mr. Toop. "Plenty more where that came from. Port isn't in the front rank as it used to be; but

[1] *Suent* = smoothly.

there's nothing like it for lifting up the heart, and the force of it bides corked up in the innards for days, so to say. 'Tis a clinging wine, and the deeper you go in the bottle, the more there is *to* it."

There were no speeches, though several urged the bridegroom to say a few words. His remarks, however, amounted to no more than a hope that the company would not make him and his wife miss their train.

"To hear him talk about his 'wife' so proud!" whispered Mrs. Bolt to Mr. Wickett, the bride's father.

"Hope he always will," answered the man.

Matthew Northmore sat next to Ruth, and in that was blessed; but little came of it.

Jill rated him for not drinking her health in anything stronger than ginger-beer. She was very talkative through the meal and very much at her ease. This fact Codd noted and commented upon rather sourly to Jill's second sister.

"'Tis more like a widow being married than a maiden, in my opinion," he said. "Whatever vartues she've got, shyness ban't one of 'em."

As the young pair departed, Jill's last words were to her mother-in-law. She shook the rice out of her clothes, kissed Mrs. Bolt warmly, and spoke:

"Don't you unpack my box and parcels, mind. I'd sooner do it myself when I come home this day week. They'm all right. And don't you be too busy for us, there's a dear. 'Tis for me to come over and look after you now."

"No, no, Jill. You've got to think of him—not me. He must take all your time—all of it. I'm hopeful that the first thing as you do will be four

new flannel shirts for him. Trust your clever fingers! You've got to cure his winter cough, Jill!"

"Time's up!" said Samuel. "God bless you, mother. You won't be out of our thoughts much, I promise you."

He stooped and kissed her.

Then Jill and Samuel drove off, while Peter Toop flung a shoe after them. But he missed the carriage and nearly hit a handsome white goose that stood and cackled with a row of butter-coloured goslings on the edge of the common.

Anon, after Mrs. Bolt's tears had been dried, the men adjourned to the skittle alley and the brothers Toop sat down to their own repast. Ruth served them, and Avisa took pleasure in helping her. She was now free, because Rachel Bolt began to turn all her attention to the mother of Jill.

Peter rolled his eyes a good deal over the meal, drank deep, and found himself in a sentimental state of mind.

"This business brings it home with terrible force," he confessed to Mrs. Pomeroy. "I mean the loneliness of the single state. 'Tis time, and more than time, the plunge was taken. The need for a wife gains on me."

"You'm so busy: you'll never give yourself a minute to look round," said she.

"But what if I have?" he answered; and presently, alone with her, he permitted himself to hint at his hopes.

"What do you think of Ruth?" he asked, as he took snuff without due care and let the powder fall freely about his person and impregnate the air.

Mrs. Pomeroy sneezed and her eyes watered.

"You know what I think of her. She's the best maiden I've seen for many a long day."

"Exactly; and that's what I say. Could I do better, Mrs. Pomeroy? Be frank."

"Far too elderly you are, my dear—far too elderly."

"Only at first sight," argued Peter. "I'm a much younger man than anybody knows but myself, and I feel years younger than the almanac makes me. But Ruth, on the other hand, is old for her age. Be it as it will, I've a feeling that she's the wife for me, and I hope if you can say a word in my favour you'll take the opportunity."

"None can say anything not in your favour. But your usual sense is out here. Look round for somebody as old again as Ruth."

Peter showed impatience in his reply.

"A woman never can understand how young a man feels. 'Tis only my beard that makes you say this. If 'twas away—and my hair back—why, I should look no more than a ripe man. I don't want some old maid as have been in market twenty years, I promise you! With my business and saved money, I've every right to seek something nicer. If you was speaking to Joel, 'twould be different."

"What does he say?"

"On this subject he says nought, because I don't give him the chance to. Sometimes I almost think he's got matrimony in his own mind, and I speak against it, in a general way—to warn him off. However, I shall ask her without 'by your leave' to anybody."

"'Tis a free country."

"And if she says 'no,' I won't deny to you that

'twill make a difference in my feeling for her. 'Twould be very lacking in dignity for a man of my position to get 'no' for an answer."

"Don't you run the risk, Peter. She's very well as she is; and so be you."

"There's such a thing as love," said Mr. Toop, with the air of a discoverer. "You can't deny it to anybody; and because I haven't felt it till now, that's no reason why I shouldn't feel it at all."

The matter dropped, and Peter asked kindly after Mrs. Pomeroy's health.

"'Tis all right, I believe. Say nothing about it," she answered.

Elsewhere Joel Toop and Mr. Bonus watched the skittle-players and discussed the event of the day.

"Makes a man soft-like to the females," declared Bonus. "To watch Mr. Peter hovering round the bride—why, 'twas like an old cock-sparrow after a butterfly."

"I am sorry he made himself so foolish," confessed Joel. "Peter don't know how sad it is to see a greybeard along with the maidens. There's only one course open that I can see, and that I shall take."

"What might that be?"

"Marry myself," said Joel firmly. "As the younger and livelier man, it is my duty. I must marry, Bonus; indeed, I'm a marrying man and ripe for it any time these last few years. We're well-to-do, and an heir must be raised up. Once I'm the father of a brave boy or two, there'll be no more nonsense from Peter. The next wedding feast you sit down to at the Jolly Huntsmen may be mine."

"I'd much sooner think 'twas going to be mine," declared Mr. Bonus. "For that matter, I know a very proper party."

After tea the company broke up, and Avisa Pomeroy walked home with Emmanuel Codd.

"Why for wouldn't Lizzie and schoolmaster come to the wedding?" he asked. "I heard a good few ax why not. Of course with Ives 'twas understood."

Mrs. Pomeroy smiled.

"To be plain with you, Arthur Brown thought it a little under him to go. I laughed at the young man. Do you know what'll happen when he marries our Lizzie?"

Mr. Codd sniffed.

"He'll be too high and mighty to come to his own wedding, belike?"

"No; but he'll not be sorry to get advancement and set up his staff and sign a bit farther from his wife's people."

"I know the sort," said Codd spitefully. "Very grand and superior till a wagon-load of childer come; then they've no objection to let grandparents ease the work, and take the young ones off their hands free gratis. There's nothing so damned selfish on this earth as the joyful parents of a quiverful. Maybe you'll find that out yet."

CHAPTER X

THE LONE STONES

AMONG MEMORIALS of neolithic man still scattered on these western wastes, where once he lived and laboured, there shall be found circles of unhewed stones flung here and there in sequestered regions and above the union of rivers. Many similar relics have vanished, and, in ignorance, the Moor folk of yesterday tore up a thousand evidences of the Later Stone Age to build their 'new-take' walls or mend their roads; but a few significant fragments have escaped, and these old-time granite cartularies still stand in lonely places; still strike the sudden wanderer with interest or awe, in measure of his own mental equipment; still tell of the morning of human society, when men had begun to gather themselves together, appoint rulers, establish laws, and fear the dead.

Langstone Moor stretches to the north-west of Great Mis Tor, and lies thick set with traces of these vanished people. Beside Walla happen many of their ruined homes; elsewhere stands a menhir, or 'long stone,' which names this waste; while between that tomb and the village, dominating heath, morass, and ambient hills with its own mystery, shall be seen a cirque of sixteen unhewn boulders.

The granite masses loom suddenly, like magic creatures, upon the vision of the wanderer; they come as some sleight and unreal trick of the desert; they lift themselves out of nothing. At one moment the enduring and featureless fabric of the waste surrounds a chance spectator; in the next he stands startled before the silent company of the Lone Stones.

Viewed on a day of late August against the purple background of Great Mis Tor, the Lone Stones glimmered under sunshine, and lacked much of that mystic and foreboding air that oftentimes hung over them at hours of fleeting mist, in morning and evening twilights, or during the darkness of night and storm. Scarcely a cloud dimmed the September blue; the air danced along the immense planes of the Moor; cattle roamed far off, yet their frequent presence within the circle was manifest, for upon more than one of the old stones might be seen flecks of red, black, and dun hair from the wandering herds that here sometimes gathered to rub their hides against the granite. The circle continued its vigil of ages, subject only to Time's tireless hand. Some of the fragments were sharp; some were solid; some looked like hooded wights, that bent here under weight of years or ardour of prayer; some reared indifferent; some threatened to fall; and to-day, not for the first time, they compassed within their brooding circuit a miserable man. The haunting boulders unconsciously added to his gloom by their inexorable demeanour, yet he made no effort to depart from them. He lay along beneath the largest, and not the murmur of Walla far below, not the cry of distant kine, not the breath of the wind upon the heath could

change his mood, lift his heart, or challenge his misery. He envied his brothers of dust assembled round him. He felt that the stones were superior to him, by reason of their impassivity and freedom from grief. Henceforth he must be himself a stone—but a living one.

Here lay Matthew Northmore, and a mile distant, with a white face and beating heart, a woman hastened from him and mourned that she had stricken him with such unutterable sorrow. That he had spoiled her own little holiday was a sort of consolation for Ruth. She felt it right to suffer, because she had made another suffer.

That morning she had played truant and told her kinsmen they must attend to the inn themselves. She had taken a pasty and a basket, then set out for the Moor to live through one day alone with her thoughts. She went indeed to gather whortleberries; but the fruit was an excuse for a holiday. On her way the girl passed behind Stone Park, and Northmore saw her. He let her go a mile into the loneliness, then braced himself to his delayed task, followed, and offered himself and all that he had.

She had refused tenderly, almost regretfully. But there was no hesitation in her answer, no ground for hope that time would change her conviction. He believed that he knew the reason, and felt almost tempted to reveal his knowledge; but he was a man, and his misery could not at this stage of life sink him below his manhood. Ruth cared for Ives Pomeroy and Matthew had discovered it. As yet none knew this beside himself. It may be doubted if the girl herself quite realised the truth. But Northmore had done so, and to-day, while her eternal 'no'

tolled in his heart, every thought and instinct bore upon that fatal discovery.

For the time he was merely miserable above the common lot and knew not what must come of it. He possessed some force of character; but full share of elementary leaven blended therewith. There came to him, during the hours of that sun-filled day, strange thoughts bred by this tribulation. To a seeing eye, from the dust of the bygone people again arose their stubborn spirits to join hands with Northmore through the centuries, and inform this living being with their primitive determination and ferocity. Here, perhaps, where now he sprawled his forlorn carcass, great fires had swallowed the limbs of great men. Here, under the earth that his body covered, there might still repose the ashes of the mighty ones.

To the man now came wrath and the hate of loss. He played the casuist and argued upon the event. A subtlety not native woke from the prick of his sorrow and inspired him. He told himself that this was not the end; that she must be disabused; that only lasting failure, disappointment, and unhappiness could ever come to her from love of Ives Pomeroy; that the quicker such an idol was flung in dust at her feet, the better for her content and peace of mind. He argued that any course of action embracing this revelation for Ruth was doubly and trebly justified. First, her future might be saved thereby; secondly (and this was vital to his own conscience), exposure could not hurt the other man, because Ives did not love Ruth. He dinned this into himself to still an inevitable uneasiness. That the woman should be made to see the truth of Ives Pomeroy

was only kindness to her; but it was no unkindness or injustice to Pomeroy, since he and his affections and interests were not concerned with her. The phrase 'the truth of Ives Pomeroy' presently recurred to Matthew's mind somewhat sternly. He was even just enough to ask himself whether he knew the truth of Ives Pomeroy. But he was not just enough, under his present storm of soul, to answer justly. He told himself that he did know all any man needed to know; that Pomeroy was very obviously not destined to make a woman happy; that even his own mother confessed as much. What Avisa could admit concerning her son was enough. Northmore saw his road clearly in so far as the immediate course of it extended. As for its goal, he could but hope that her secret regard for Ives once destroyed and its ruin removed from Ruth's mind, he might yet fill the empty place.

Some sort of peace crowned this conclusion. He rose when the Lone Stones cast long shadows easterly over the ruddy heath, and sunset flames burnt red as the pyres of old amongst them. He went his way with primal passions masked by modern intelligence. Essential, immemorial emotions battled with the ages of mental evolution, and even conquered them. For a brief moment of time they dragged Northmore's whole being back to harmony with the spirits that had heaved up these stones; to kinship with those bygone ones who came to dwell amid the Moor's stern verities, and with them brought their own heritage of still earlier instincts.

He departed at last, vanished in fading light, and left the Lone Stones to their eternal conference.

Matthew found no escape from his mind for many days; yet with time his nature returned nearer to itself and he banished certain thoughts of action against his rival. There came an opportunity to do the other evil, but Northmore resisted the temptation to take it.

As for Ruth, her immediate concern was banished swiftly, and erratic chance, not content with throwing one man at her feet, thrust upon her the proposal of a second before that day was done.

It happened that Mr. Peter Toop left home after tea upon the mournful business of his trade. A farmer had died suddenly at Okehampton, and his wife, being a Merivale woman and designing to return there, sent for Mr. Toop in her sorrow, that she might make him her friend and arrange with him other matters beside the funeral.

Peter went off for the night and proposed to stop at Okehampton until the following afternoon. Joel, therefore, though not actually of opinion that the moment was ripe, felt such an opportunity too good to lose. When the bar closed, he stopped Ruth as she was going to her room and invited her to join him while he smoked a pipe.

"I know you've been out on the Moor and are tired," he said. "But there's nothing like a bit of news for making us forget weary limbs. Bring in a glass of lemonade for yourself and a drop of whisky for me. I've got something very interesting to tell you, Ruth."

She had not yet thought of sleep, for her mind ran much upon the Lone Stones and a sorrowful man left standing amongst them.

Joel smoked his pipe and drew out a comfortable chair for Ruth. He began by remarking

casually that he had not felt so well, or so young, for many years. Then, from force of habit, he expressed a wish that Peter enjoyed like vigour and a regret that he did not. Ruth drank her lemonade, folded her hands in her lap, and waited for him to speak. Presently she raised a small palm and yawned behind it.

At this signal, Joel took up his parable. He had planned the campaign, and his line of attack lay very clearly before him. He felt interested in pending operations, but not at all nervous or doubtful of the issue. Mr. Toop's heart was neither sanguine nor fearful, but merely assured. He argued his chances on practical business principles, and found that there could be only one answer from a woman so sensible and so utterly dependent as Ruth. He opened the discussion by reminding her delicately of that fact.

"'Twas a thousand pities your father never insured his life—a man so careful and wise in most respects," he said.

"Yes, it was," she admitted.

"However, no good crying over spilt milk. You can't help being without means, and after all, in my opinion, you've got what's far better than a small income, and that's a big bump of common sense. I don't say it in flattery, Ruth; 'tis no more than your due. You'll allow that I'm a judge of what common sense means?"

"I'm sure you are."

"For a man who may justly be called young yet, I think I've got my share. Peter's seen it in me, and allowed it these many years. He's different. Though so much older, there's a wilful way with him. He wants relief from the coffins, and goes to the other extreme and puts on

a boyish way that's rather unfortunate in an elderly man—to say it kindly. But I've always felt glad that he didn't marry."

"He talks of it as a thing he'll do presently."

"I know. That's his light nature. There was a widow lived home by us ten year ago, and he was always rolling his eyes at her. I dare say that you've marked the difference in our characters, so quick as you are?"

"I like you both, and I'm very grateful to you both."

"So you should be; though I won't tell you which of us it was thought of bringing you here against the arguments in favour of a professional barmaid. However, you can guess. And this I will say; when you came to the Jolly Huntsmen, me and Peter entertained an angel unawares. You'll allow that's pretty handsome praise, I think."

"You're too good to me—both of you."

"I'm full of ideas about you, and, all in good time, you'll know them. But one of these ideas is such a whacker, so to say, that it quite swallows up all the rest, like Aaron's rod swallowed up the magicians'. Anyway, it's this tremendous thought that's come to me, and to-night I'm going to put it before you; and I warn you 'twill banish sleep."

"Wouldn't it be better to wait for Mr. Peter?"

"No," said Joel shortly. "It would not. Don't keep dragging him in. This has got nothing whatever to do with Peter. So don't mention his name again, please."

"I won't, then."

"Now the question is my position in the world. Ruth, you must know that I'm very well to do. I've a half share in this business, and the poultry

and pig farm is all mine. Between ourselves, I get a bit more out of my eggs and bacon than Peter does by his coffins. As to my age, I may tell you that I am many years younger than people suppose. The exact figure has escaped me, but if you said forty-five, you would probably be much nearer the mark than you would have the least idea. Now the time has come when I am looking round for a helpmate. To put it in a nutshell: I have looked and I have found!"

"Really? I'm so glad, cousin Joel!"

"You'll be gladder still when you know who 'tis."

"How quiet you've kept your courting!"

"As to courting," said Mr. Toop, "I've my own ideas on that subject, and I can't say I've ever felt any respect for they philandering sort of fellows, who stream about after young women, and are never farther off from 'em than the rim of their petticoats. No; I set to work very different. First let a maiden understand what you are; then, if you feel she'd make you a proper wife, go boldly and offer to take her. Don't go empty-handed. Tell her how you stand—in figures, if need be; and also tell her that what's yours is hers—so long as she does her part of the bargain. It's a great deal to say, but she must justify it. That's my idea of love."

"For the life of me I can't guess," she said. "Not a Merivale woman surely?"

"Yes and no."

"Tell me quick."

"Like your modesty not to guess. In a word, then . . ."

He stopped, bent forward, and patted her shoulder at each syllable of his next sentence.

"I be going to marry a young woman by the name of Ruth Rendle—if she'll let me!"

Only for a moment was the girl even regretful. Northmore's pleading returned to her thought. It reduced the present proposal to farce. Indeed, after the briefest silence she actually laughed, and Joel was annoyed.

"Where's your manners?" he said sharply. "Did you hear me? If 'tis hysterics, of course that's different."

The possibility soothed him, but Ruth explained that it was not hysterics.

"Dear cousin Joel, how good and kind and large-minded to think of such a thing! but really —no, I couldn't do that."

He stared at her and scratched his whiskers. His mouth remained slightly open. His expression was one of genuine astonishment, and only gradually it changed to annoyance.

"You'd better think twice," he said. "I believe in these cases the maidenly instinct is often to refuse without really meaning it. But, mark me, there's a good few women mooning about to-day that be sorry to the soul because they said 'no' when they ought to have said 'yes.' I've got my self-respect, I warn you, Ruth. I—but . . . there—think again. We'll take your answer as unsaid."

"Indeed, but I meant it. I'm very proud that you could have even thought of me; but it couldn't be. I didn't answer in a hurry or without proper reflection, and I wouldn't hurt your self-respect for anything; but I couldn't marry you—under any possible circumstances."

He drank his whisky as though washing down a pill.

"So be it," he said. "I won't ask your reasons, because a woman's reasons—only one thing I've a right to say; and 'tis your duty to obey me."

"Gladly I'll obey you in all I can."

"You just promise on your solemn oath not to marry Peter. I've a right to order that."

"I will promise most faithfully not to marry him—even if he asks."

"You couldn't marry him if he didn't," snapped Mr. Toop. "Anyway, I believe he will ask. I've seen foolish signs of late that he hadn't wit to hide. Now you'd better go to bed."

He was still much annoyed, and when she rose and extended her hand to him, he refused to take it.

"No," he said. "I don't find myself at all inclined to friendship. In fact, not to put too fine a point upon it, I'm a good bit niffed with you, Ruth Rendle. I thought your strong point was sense, and to-day you've done about the silliest thing that even a woman ever did do in my knowledge."

CHAPTER XI

CONCERNING PHEASANTS

MOLESKIN'S HOUSE, which stood midway between Princetown and Merivale, was set into the side of a hill a quarter of a mile from the road, and more resembled the habitation of a cave-dweller than the home of a civilised being. It looked like some gigantic and suspicious live creature with its head thrust through a hole, yet ready to dive back into the earth at a moment's warning. Two small windows glimmered under a straw roof, and upon the thatch heavy stones were laid to keep the winter storms from blowing all away. The door of Mr. Cawker's abode was of a bright scarlet colour, thanks to a pot of paint the owner had somehow acquired. It flamed across the Moor and presented a very conspicuous spectacle. Moleskin declared that no dishonest man would have adorned his portals with such a brilliant tint, and referred to his door as a guarantee of character. The hovel was a disgrace, and each year a rumour ran that the Duchy proposed to expel Mr. Cawker and pull down his dwelling; but the thing did not happen and the tenant made no objection, for none knew better than himself the peculiar secret charms of this abode.

Hither came Ives Pomeroy on a day in late September. His friend had been stricken down with a cold upon the chest, and for the moment Moleskin repined at home.

Ives had gratified his mother by some active expressions of sorrow at the poacher's physical misfortunes, and when he went further and proposed to visit Moleskin and take him some refreshments, Avisa prepared them.

"I could wish 'twas any other body," she said. "But I trust you not to be led away by the old man. Remember the advantages you have had over the likes of him. You ought to try and do him good, not let him do you harm."

Moleskin expressed delight at seeing the youth, and praised him in no stinted terms for his generosity.

"A regular socialist you be," he said. "And a good working Christian in the bargain. Not a soul from Merivale have been to see me. They old Toops haven't took a bit of notice of my illness—selfish old swine. A beautiful jelly! That masterpiece of a woman, your mother, made it without a doubt. And a bit of neck of mutton, I see! Bless her for it. I won't forget, mind you. Nobody does me a good turn without having a good turn done to them sooner or later."

"I hope your dear mother finds herself doing clever," said Mary, Mr. Cawker's daughter, and Ives answered that she was pretty well.

The home of Moleskin was sufficiently dismal. He sat in an old armchair by the peat fire, with a screen behind him. He coughed and his throat rattled. His wife, whose weak spine caused her to be a confirmed invalid, lay upon a little couch

on the other side of the fire, and Mary Cawker sat in the window mending the poacher's socks. A setter dog reposed beside Moleskin, and from the passage way outside came the clucking of fowls that pecked about the threshold and house-place. They occasionally ascended to the bed-rooms also.

"Give father his physic, Mary," ordered the wife. "Doctor said he was to have it every two hours."

She fathomed her husband's purpose respecting Ives Pomeroy, and now regarded the youth with mournful eyes; but Moleskin was quite alive to the situation. He had things to say to his friend that it was not desirable his wife or daughter should hear; therefore he rose and bade the visitor follow him.

"Come in my room," he suggested. "I'm just so comfortable sitting up in my bed as I be here. Then us can talk."

"Mother thought the mutton would make some very fine broth for your father," said Ives to Mary; then he followed Moleskin.

The invalid slept on the ground floor in a little chamber behind the kitchen. It had two doors, and was rich in secret receptacles. Mr. Cawker now got into bed in his clothes, drew grimy blankets up to his neck, and put his hat on also—for warmth, as he said. He coughed and gurgled a good deal, but declared himself to be better.

With considerable cunning he played upon the moods of the younger man before reaching his own business; then, when Pomeroy was tuned to consider lawlessness, Moleskin broached an undertaking.

"I've thought a lot about you lately, and that

shameless girl who throwed you over for Samuel Bolt. Of course 'twas his expectations, and she'll live to mourn the day, for money don't take the place of a man like you. But 'tis society, not a wicked woman, that you've got to quarrel with. For my part, I'm an enemy of it, and always have been. Take that Serpell. That's the man who be the type of capital—a hard, evil-minded, godless rogue. And I'm going to be revenged upon that man! So soon as ever I can get about again, I take it out of him—at any cost. As a socialist 'tis my duty to do it, and I'm going to do it."

Ives nodded.

"I don't care how hard he's hit—or any of 'em."

"You'd very soon help to put the world right, if you could get the rising generation to look at things like you do. Well, to come to facts, I had a squint at the Oaktown birds just afore I was took ill, and a grander lot I never seed—or want to—never. Last year there was hardly any shooting to name; and I happen to know that George Job—you know—he'm good to buy six brace any day in October; and I can get six brace took in another quarter as well. I shall be up and about by then. I don't know if you feel the same as me; but I'm that full of the Christian love of mankind in general that I don't care how hard I smite these here Tories with their cant and selfishness. However, if you don't like to lend a hand, say so. Perhaps you ban't such a right-down radical as me yet. But I'm sure you'll come to it, for you've got more brain-power than an old man like me, and must understand the times better."

"I'd rather shoot Serpell than his wretched pheasants," said Ives.

"I'm proud to know a chap who can talk like that. But there's no getting rid of tyrants, same as there was in the good old times. So we'll hit him where 'twill hurt him most—in his pocket. A pheasant be worth three shilling every time—to me, and that's what we shall get."

"Damn the money! I don't want money."

"Like you to say that. You've got a regular Gospel contempt of cash, and I feel the same, for that matter; but, with a bedridden wife and a daughter, I must combine business and my duty. The labourer is worthy of his hire. However, I'll take the money. From your point of view you can either call it a stroke struck for the sake of the poor, or having a bit of sport—which you please. We've got to live, and we've got to advance our ideas. Take me. Be my dear wife and daughter to go into the workhouse and that man, Serpell, batten on the sweat of the humble? Not while I can have a dash at his pheasants!"

"I'll lend a hand with pleasure," declared Ives.

"Then we'll work together. There's a full moon in middle October, and the leaf is coming down early this year. On the twentieth I hear in private that Serpell is to have a big battoo. To go in for battoo shooting shows the sort of man he is. But it takes nine tailors to make a man, anyway; so we can't blame him there. However, you and me will have our bit of fun afore the battoo. Now I'll let you into a secret 'bout Oaktown as will much amaze you. Me and the new underkeeper from Cornwall be great friends, and he can't abide the head keeper, Gregson—as well I knowed he wouldn't. No man of spirit could."

Moleskin proceeded to elaborate a very simple

evening's work, and when Mary Cawker brought a bowl of broth to her father an hour later she found him explaining a strange weapon, that looked like a heavy metal walking-stick. Then she returned to her mother; and while the men planned a deliberate raid on Oaktown, the women mourned for Ives Pomeroy, and Mrs. Cawker bitterly regretted the fact that another hopeful youth was becoming entangled.

"Lord knows what the young generation sees in such a reckless old blade," declared Mrs. Cawker. "But whether or no, I've got too high an opinion of the Pomeroys to let it go on if I can prevent it."

"How can we? What power have we got? Father always catches people just when they'm ripe for mischief. He knows to an hour when they'll do his bidding. He got hold of Saul Bassett when he'd been turned off from the quarry, and now he's catched this chap."

The invalid sighed; then she considered a scheme to upset her husband's hopes.

"You can't tell his mother anything. But there's one you might speak to next time you are down there. I mean Emmanuel Codd. He's old, and he's worked for them all his life. If you was to tell him that his master and father are caballing, he might use his wits to prevent it."

"I heard the word 'pheasant,'" said Mary, "and father was showing Mr. Pomeroy his air-gun when I went in."

"Pheasants, of course. 'Tis the pheasant time in a few days. Many an' many a woman finds it hard to forgive A'mighty God for making pheasants; and I'm one of 'em. When I'm left alone on my back here sometimes, and all's still, and I hear the birds croaking out 'pon the Moor,

as they will in May, my heart gets as cold as a lump of ice, and I look on to October, and spring's nought to me."

"Be brave about it," said Mary Cawker. "Can't go on for ever. One of two things must happen to father afore many more years pass: he must be catched red-handed, or he must give it up."

"He'll never give it up."

"Then he'll go on till he'm too weak to escape, and they'll take him."

"A blessed hope," said the sufferer. "For if they catch him I must go in the infirmary and end my days in one of they incurable homes, all easy and comfortable."

"Better still that father should reform. He's often thought of it quite serious himself, for that matter. Anyway, I'll speak to Emmanuel Codd and ax him to do what he can."

Then Moleskin got up and returned to the fire, while Ives, expressing a hope that he would soon be perfectly well again, set off home.

"A noble young man—a right-down follower of Christ," said the poacher quite seriously, after Pomeroy had left. "All for share and share alike, and uplifting the humble and meek."

But Mrs. Cawker cast a withering glance from her couch.

"You bad old devil!" she said. "Drink your broth and shut your mouth. You ought to blush for yourself every time you pass a young chap. 'Christ,' indeed! I wonder you dare to take the Name."

Mary was as good as her word, and made an opportunity to see the head man of Vixen Tor

Farm. She supposed him the friend of Ives Pomeroy, and discussed the farmer in absolute ignorance that she spoke with his enemy.

"A son of Belial be your father," said Mr. Codd. "I don't say it out of no ill feeling to you or your poor mother; but Moleskin's right-down wicked, and as to Ives Pomeroy, he's gunpowder for any devil's match—always have been."

"Warn him, then. Tell him what me and mother know only too well: that my father's no friend to him or any young fellow."

"How should such a youth have friends?" asked Codd. "Look at me—a person of some account, I believe, and pretty well up in human nature. He flouts me, calls me names, scoffs at my large sense! 'Tis quite enough for me to offer advice for him to scorn it. If I told him to stick to Moleskin through thick and thin, I dare say he'd never see your father again. But if I warned him that he was doing a dangerous deed, he'd only laugh in my face."

"His mother, then."

"That's no good. She don't understand him worth a rap. Too soft with him by far, as I've told her till I'm sick of telling her."

"Well, there it is," said the girl. "We can't do no more. They are going into something together. Pheasants 'tis; and that's all I know about it."

"I'll keep it in mind," answered Emmanuel; and he did.

Upon reflection he guessed pretty accurately at his enemy's intention, but instead of making any appeal to Ives, the old man went elsewhere. At the Jolly Huntsmen various people were

gathered together on the following Saturday night, and in the course of general conversation Pomeroy uttered opinions which brought upon him the harsh condemnation of Matthew Northmore. The farmer, to do him justice, spoke from conviction, not personal bias. But Ives answered angrily, and it required the united efforts of Peter and Joel Toop to silence the disputants.

Immediately afterwards Northmore left the bar and Emmanuel Codd followed him. Among the latter's failings was a lack of physical courage, but he had shared the farmer's indignation and taken his part in the argument with Ives. Therefore Matthew heard him now and seriously considered the things that he spoke.

Codd explained that the master of Vixen Tor Farm was in league with a poacher, and this Northmore already guessed. But when the labourer declared that Ives had actually planned to help Moleskin, then Northmore viewed the facts more gravely. For the time, however, he had fought and conquered his personal dislike of Pomeroy, as now appeared.

"For his mother's sake I'd do anything to save the fool," he said. "A sharp caution is about the most likely thing to steady him. No business of mine, but yet I'll make it so. Leave the rest to me. I'll talk to Inspector Bachelor and get him to warn Pomeroy."

Then Codd departed, a disappointed man. He had hoped that Northmore would lay a trap for the enemy; but that was not Matthew's intention. His own heart had taught him much since Ruth's refusal. He bore ill-will towards Ives, but the temptation to use this knowledge as a weapon

was very slight. First he determined to take no step at all. Then he decided to help the younger. He changed his mind thrice before the issue, but finally he endeavoured to do Ives a service and spoke to the local inspector of police concerning him. His good offices came too late: his words, instead of being a friendly hint to Inspector Bachelor, to help a young man out of harm's way, presented the policeman with a valuable clue. For Ives had already fallen.

CHAPTER XII

AVISA TRIES TO SAVE HER SON

TOWARDS THE END of October there dawned a day of tempest and heavy rain. Each breath of the storm seemed to clear a thousand forest boughs; Walla ran hoarsely through her gorges beneath Vixen; and only at even did the weather change, the wind rest a while, and peace return with darkness. Then the moon rose, and presently, in many a glade and glen, the wet fallen leaves shone like stars upon the dark earth and made little constellations that glimmered there against the gloom of night.

This was the occasion when Ives Pomeroy set out with Moleskin to shoot pheasants in Oaktown woods. The poacher had hoped to be earlier afield, but his doctor prevented that, and Mr. Cawker, for personal reasons, made no hurry to appear in public.

He had arranged an exceedingly simple plan of action. The younger man visited one important preserve; the older, with his air-gun, sought another. Ives played decoy, and while Moleskin slew, Pomeroy fired a fowling-piece merely to attract attention. Thrice, at intervals of five minutes, he woke the echoes and set dogs barking and men running. Secure in his superior

speed Ives waited until he actually heard the forces of law and order closing in upon him; then he set off and was soon safe enough. One man, however, had seen him cross a drive in the moonlight. The gamekeeper believed that he recognised young Pomeroy; but he could not be positive. Meantime Mr. Cawker killed twenty pheasants. They roosted in the pine trees and, under bright moonlight, made an easy target. Ives was first at the appointed tryst, some miles distant, and by three o'clock in the morning Moleskin, very much fatigued, joined him there. The birds were then handed to a receiver, who had driven out from Plymouth with a pony and trap.

Three days afterwards came the sequel, and certain police, working with the Oaktown keepers, prepared to make an arrest. Mr. Cawker did not escape suspicion; but he was known to be ill, and, on the day before his excursion, let it be understood that he must continue to keep the house by doctor's orders. His women were familiar with his movements; but they had long been schooled to hold their peace. The poacher, moreover, took to bed again for a couple of days, as an additional security. By that time Northmore, in ignorance of the truth, had warned Inspector Bachelor to speak words in season to young Pomeroy; but as this man already suspected Ives on the strength of a keeper's statement, this warning amounted to confirmation.

Ives did not hide from his mother the thing that he had done, and the confession was made at a very critical moment. For once, to his surprise, Avisa's unfailing patience before his escapades appeared to desert her. She was very

angry and cried shame upon him in vigorous terms.

"How have you the heart and the face to sit there and tell me this?" she said. "You—a grown man now. You laugh—you ought to groan, Ives Pomeroy. If 'twas in my power, I'd flog you for this till my body ached; if 'twas in my power, I'd take you this instant moment to Oaktown and make you beg that man's forgiveness on your knees! Your father's son! A black day's work, and I'd never have thought it of you—I'd never have believed it."

"More fool you," he said roughly. "You ought to know me well enough by now; and if you don't, 'tis no fault of mine. My hand is against all slavery and sweating, and I'll strike where I please and who I please. Serpell's a rogue. Let him dare lay a finger on me and I'll tell the truth about him afore the public—damned knave that he is."

"Do two wrongs make a right?" she asked. "If he's a dishonest man, is that a reason why you should sink to this? Would you filch his purse? Would you go in his shop to Plymouth and steal his goods? You—a son of Ives Pomeroy?"

"Of course you argue like a woman," he said. "Can't you see the difference between such things? Can't you see I'm all against property and want the land for the poor? Who be this chap to stick up walls and say, 'you shan't come here' or 'you shan't come there'? Damn him and his Tory robbery! The earth belongs to us all; and pheasants be just natural things, like any other birds, or the fish in the river."

"Be quiet and hear me," said Avisa. "That

any son of mine should be wild and silly, and venturesome and rash, was natural. But no son of mine, and my husband, has the right to be a fool. You're talking wicked folly, and you know it. What did you say to the fox that stole two ducks last winter? And him only a hungry beast with the usual four-footed manners! And what will the world say to you for stealing a man's game—you—supposed to be properly taught and a Christian?"

"The world will say nothing at all, because the world will know nothing at all," he answered. "I've told nobody but you, and none else will ever hear about it. I wish to God you was larger-minded. Time was when you'd have laughed at this—same as you laughed at pranks I've played before."

"'Pranks'—yes. You've never gone poaching before—you've never taken what didn't belong to you before; or if you have, you've never had the impudence to tell me about it."

"All right, then: I'll not trouble you with my affairs again. I might have known a woman like you would have misunderstood; but I gave you credit for more sense than you've got seemingly."

"You gave me credit for less honesty than I've got, and less love for you than I've got. Be your mind so crooked that you couldn't see what this must mean to me? Be you mad, Ives?"

"I hope I am, if the rest of the down-trodden fools round here be sane. I despise the world, and I despise you for siding with the rich against the poor. But you needn't trouble about me no more. I know one or two yet what don't think I'm mad. Fearless chaps like me, who see that things are all wrong and

ban't afraid to fight against 'em, be always mad, no doubt."

"May God A'mighty help you to see clearer," she said very earnestly.

"I'll go my way and hate injustice and fight it with my last breath, wherever it lands me. You can mark that."

"Life has got to teach you your lesson."

"Life won't teach me that labour be treated properly by capital; life won't teach me the strong want to help the weak."

They were interrupted by Lizzie Pomeroy. She was not frightened, but infinitely surprised and in great haste.

"Why, here's Mr. Bachelor and two other policemen coming up through the field!" she said. "Whatever be they wanting here, mother?"

Avisa looked at her son.

"Ives! Ives!" she said.

"I know! It's all right; they've smelt a rat! You can guess where I shall be. Let me have some food when the coast's clear and then I'll be away till the storm's blown over. Find out if Moleskin's took and let me know up on the Vixen after dark."

He was gone through a back entrance, long before the policemen had reached the farm. Indeed, from his secret den, high up in the fastness of the Vixen, Pomeroy watched the officers arrive beneath. His heart beat hard with excitement at this event. He knew not how they had connected him with the raid, and began to wonder much what had happened to Moleskin. A dozen plans for future action also filled his mind as he watched his mother address an inspector.

Before the police arrived, Avisa had spoken to Lizzie and told her the truth.

"The darkest day that's ever fallen for us, my pretty," she said quietly. "Dear Ives have done wrong, Lizzie. His own folly and another's wickedness be to blame, I reckon. He've been shooting game birds: that's what he's wanted for."

"Ives—Ives wanted? Oh, mother!"

The girl turned white. Terror now came into her face. She spoke quickly to Avisa and held tightly to her hand, like a little frightened child.

"Oh, mother, save him, save him!" she said.

The men came up the garden path and their voices sounded loud in the silence. Avisa Pomeroy did not hear her girl. She was looking at the sky over the Moor. Her mind worked swiftly and her lips moved. "Lord, have mercy on my son; Lord, have mercy on my son," she whispered to herself again and again.

Then she felt her daughter's hand and heard Lizzie cry once more.

"Save him, mother, save him!"

It seemed now that Avisa came to herself.

"Bear yourself braver, Lizzie. Yes—yes; I'll save him, please God."

She turned to the men.

"Good morning, Mr. Bachelor."

"Good morning, ma'am. I'm sorry for our errand, and I hope with all my heart your boy will be able to clear himself; but 'tis rather bad against him. Anyway, he must come with us, please. 'Tis feared that he had a hand in that business to Oaktown."

"Yes, he had," she answered quietly. "You

will find him hidden up in the rocks there. I'll show you where he is." The policeman stared.

"'Tis a terrible thing for you—a terrible thing. I wish to God, ma'am, you'd not been called to do this," he said earnestly.

Her sad eyes met his.

"So do I," she answered. "Love's a hard taskmaster sometimes."

She led them to the Vixen, while Lizzie hastened to her grandmother with the tidings of what had happened.

"Given him up! Given Ives up!" cried the ancient. "Given up my son's son to the constable!"

Avisa took the men to the foot of Vixen Tor, and Ives, hidden from view, watched his secret divulged and his escape defeated.

"Ives Pomeroy!" shouted Mr. Bachelor. "I've got to arrest you in the name of the law for shooting pheasants to Oaktown on the night of the twenty-fifth of October. For the present you'd better to say nought. Us have got a trap down below and you'll be took to Tavistock and brought afore the Justices on Wednesday next. So come down, if you please."

The man aloft boiled with passion against his mother. Her back was turned now and she walked slowly to her house. His rage did not prevent him from seeing the futility of resistance.

"Don't make worse trouble," urged Mr. Bachelor. "It won't help in the long run. I've got you now, and 'tis only adding to the offence to resist me."

Pomeroy perceived the truth of these remarks. He showed himself, ignored the police, and shouted to his mother:

"God damn you evermore for this, you traitor to your own son! And mark me: never again, so long as I live, will I bring my head under your roof. If I go to hell, 'tis you've driven me there —remember that, you heartless devil!"

She heard all and went her way without turning.

Then Pomeroy descended and soon found himself driving to Tavistock. He preserved absolute silence, and no man heard his voice again that day.

Avisa was entering her home when her husband's mother met her in the door.

"What have you done, woman?" she asked. "D'you mind that this man was the child of Ives Pomeroy? Could the son of my son, for all his wicked tricks, have earned clink?[1] 'Tis not to be thought of, and you've worked evil in this house, and marred your boy's life for ever—for ever, I tell you!"

"Ives will never darken our doors again," sobbed Lizzie.

Then Avisa spoke. She took out her handkerchief and wiped Lizzie's eyes with it. Her own were dry.

"Darken our doors he can't, my pretty. Better than sunshine always. I doubt you'm both wrong. My son will come home to me a wiser man—some day—yes, he'll come home, if I know him true."

She left them then, departed to her own chamber, and remained invisible until the time of the midday meal. Then she returned placid and calm, with her heart hidden. But Lizzie was prostrated, and old Jane Pomeroy wept without ceasing.

[1] *Clink* = prison.

CHAPTER XIII

OPINIONS

IT HAPPENED that most of the few persons who felt interest concerning Ives Pomeroy were collected at the Jolly Huntsmen on the night following his arrest, and the incident formed material for a somewhat lively debate.

Emmanuel Codd, as being most familiar with the facts, was listened to very attentively, and when he explained what had really happened, a murmur of wonder broke from those who heard. There were present the brothers Toop, Ruth Rendle, Samuel Bolt, and Nicholas Warren, one of the policemen who had taken Pomeroy; others joined the company afterwards.

"'Tis a terrible far-reaching thing," said Peter. "Because though a month or so, which is what he will get, ban't nothing out of the man's life in itself, the event goes into his future history and is a black mark against him for evermore."

"If she'd let him hide, he'd have got off, no doubt, and gone for a sailor perhaps, or some such thing," explained Warren. "I've known like cases. Then, when he came back in a year or so, the matter would have blown over and there'd have been no arrest."

"She thought different, however," said Joel

Toop. He had been gloomy of late since Ruth refused him; but this stroke of misfortune for another cheered him indirectly.

"Never heard the like," declared Samuel Bolt. "For a parent to do such a thing—'tis very wonderful in my judgment—eh, miss?"

He spoke to Ruth, and she answered with some emotion.

"I can't believe that it is as they say."

"'Tis true enough," answered the policeman. "I was there when my gentleman come down from his perch and cussed her. Awful language; and she took it so calm as a sheep takes killing."

"It would have killed some women," said Ruth Rendle.

"A creature forged of strong steel," declared Peter.

They discussed the gravity of Pomeroy's sin, and were divided about it. The pheasants had not been traced and the evidence was circumstantial, until Mrs. Pomeroy actually declared her son guilty.

Now Matthew Northmore entered. He had promised a book to Ruth some time before she refused him, and to-night he brought it. But he came at a moment somewhat inopportune, for his name was on Codd's lips at the time.

"How did they trace it to the chap? That's what I don't know," said Joel Toop.

Nicholas Warren was unable to enlighten him.

"You must ask the inspector," he answered. "I can't say how he come by the clue, though certainly a gamekeeper thought he seed Pomeroy on the night."

"More than that went to it," said Mr. Codd. 'I may take some credit, I believe. A little bird

whispered to me what was doing, and I did my duty and mentioned it. Not to mince words, 'twas Mr. Northmore that I told. He'm a sportsman and a gentleman, and holds such evil doings in scorn."

"Why, you'm a stranger!" cried Peter, from behind the bar; for at this moment Matthew entered.

He nodded and then spoke to Ruth.

"I've brought the book, Miss Rendle—the one I promised."

Her manner was constrained as she thanked him, but he set it down to the painful past rather than the present. Then Joel Toop asked the farmer a question and he began to understand.

"'Twas you, then, that helped the police to take young Pomeroy—so Codd here says?"

Northmore did not answer, but looked at Emmanuel.

"In a manner of speaking you did," explained the head man at Vixen Tor. "I told you what was in the wind, and you answered back that you'd do something."

"That's right: I did so," admitted Northmore. "But don't let there be any misunderstanding about my part. I had no wish to work the man any harm. 'Twas the other way about. I'd hoped to get him cautioned in time. Unfortunately the trouble was brewed already, and when I spoke to Bachelor, it only served to confirm his suspicions. But I suppose nobody doubts my motives?"

He looked at Ruth as he spoke. She was wiping glasses and paid him no attention.

"'Tis a parlous business for the family," declared Peter. "I never heard that a mother

found herself equal to such a hard thing afore."

"She was wrong, for my part," answered the policeman; and Samuel Bolt confessed that he blamed Mrs. Pomeroy also.

"She ought to have looked on ahead; but no woman ever does," murmured Joel.

"'Twas too terrible a thing and will set the house against itself for ever," foretold Samuel Bolt.

Northmore, however, took the other side.

"I don't agree with you," he said. "'Twas a brave and seemly thing for her to do, and . . ."

To the astonishment of the company Ruth interrupted him. Anger lighted her face. Her voice shook with it. For the first time in the experience of any present she revealed a fierce temper; and it was Matthew Northmore who suffered the storm.

"You say that! You, that went behind the man's back and pretended to be his friend and stabbed him! 'A brave thing!' About as brave as what you did yourself, I should think! What had he ever done to you that you should treat him so? What had he ever done to his mother that she should cast him out like that? 'Twas no true mother did that, afore God!"

Silence followed Ruth's speech; then Northmore spoke.

"I'm sorry to think you don't take my word, Miss Rendle—bitterly sorry. I hope you'll live to see differently. You can ask the inspector what time I first mentioned Pomeroy to him, if you like. 'Twas too late."

Then Peter, to gain private ends, took his kinswoman's part.

"The question is what you wanted to interfere for at all, if I may say so," he remarked firmly. "I hate the old to be against the young. 'Twas no more than a bit of silly high spirits in the man, and I do think that he's punished a deal too hard. Ives Pomeroy, being what he is, will go down as sure as there's a screw loose in him. His mother's done for him, in my opinion."

"She knows best," said Northmore. "If Miss Rendle . . ."

He broke off blankly, for Ruth, at the mention of her name, left the bar and did not return to it.

"You've made her properly cross," said Peter. "And I don't blame her. A great stickler for justice she be, and with all the sense of a man. There's no doubt most people will agree with her that you're much to blame, Matthew."

"'Tis poor Mrs. Pomeroy is to blame, in my humble opinion, not Mr. Northmore," said Samuel Bolt. "How did he know what would fall out? But she did."

"Mrs. Pomeroy's a woman," replied Peter, "and the wisest woman among us may lose her head at a pinch and take a wrong turn—especially a mother. Wrong she have done, if my judgment counts for anything."

"She did right—dead right," answered Northmore; and with this sentiment he left the bar.

"My word! You gived him a flea in his ear, Peter," said Joel. "And I'm not sorry, for he'll keep away now. Not a drink ordered again, you see. Nought but his silly books for Ruth. But she've made her mind pretty clear to-night too—thank God. She's done with him, anyhow."

"I hope he'll take it so. Her eyes flashed scorn against him—very surprising."

"Who'd have thought the young woman had got such a temper hidden away?" asked Mr. Bolt.

"They all have," answered Codd. "Trust me: there's not one of 'em can't show their claws, given the thing to gally 'em. A proper tantrum; and what do it mean? Trust me to know!"

"Trust you to put a wrong meaning on it," said the policeman, who did not like Mr. Codd. "If us was to follow out all the things you say, there'd not be a man this side of Princetown as wasn't in trouble—except yourself."

"If I can see farther through a millstone than you, Nicholas, 'tis your misfortune in your line of life," said Emmanuel sharply.

Joel now looked at the matter from another point of view.

"A fool and not more nor less—that Pomeroy," he declared. "We must suffer fools gladly, as the Bible tells us; but 'tis a great trouble to a community to have 'em in it, and a great drag on credit and progress in general."

"That's what the fools be here for," answered his brother. "If 'twasn't for them, us clever people would be too clever, and the world might go on too fast. They be meant to check progress."

"Ah," said Mr. Joel, "and mighty well they do their work."

"Wise men may be the salt of the earth, but fools are the staple of it," added Peter. "In fact they be the bulk of every nation. 'Tis the plan of God. If us was all wise and all good, His almighty task be ended, and the Devil's job likewise."

"Contrary to nature, no doubt," admitted Samuel Bolt. "Of course what's contrary to nature can't be, can it, Mr. Toop?"

"It cannot, Sam. And therefore," summed up Peter, "we must have fools, and we must have chaps like Pomeroy, and chaps like Northmore, and even right-down rogues and vagabonds—such as this here man!"

Thus did Mr. Toop welcome Moleskin, who entered the bar while he concluded his reflections.

"That's a nice way to greet a chap just off his bed of sickness," said the poacher. "However, you always had a funny idea of a joke. You didn't ought to make jokes, Peter. They don't suit your tone of voice, my old dear. But what's this they tell me of young Mr. Pomeroy? I hope 'tis only a silly story, Nicholas Warren?"

"True enough," said the policeman. "I helped to take him."

Moleskin heard every particular of the narrative and expressed himself as much amazed.

"At the very beginning of the man's career—to go and let himself be nabbed like that! 'Twill spoil his nerve for years very like, and make him take a hatred of policemen. And I dare swear the poor fellow's innocent as an unborn baby."

"You'm a deep scoundrel," answered Codd fiercely. "Standing there afore honest men and pretending as you know nought. You'm a disgrace to the police, that's what you are—like a thing they can't cure be a disgrace to the doctors."

Mr. Cawker ordered his liquor and laughed uproariously.

"Catch me first and cure me afterwards, as the haddock said. And why can't they catch me? Because I never do nothing to merit it. Because I'm an upright, straight chap as no man have ever seen do anything outside law and order. 'Tis you be the wicked ones to say such things against

me. It strains my charity now and again to keep friends with such people."

He winked at the policeman, and Codd answered:

"You led the man away, and the sin's on your shoulders and the money's in your pocket."

"In that case," answered Mr. Cawker, "the police have certainly collared the wrong man, as their manner is. If I shot the birds and took the money, what have they arrested Ives for? Let 'em tell us that. Anyway, as I was in bed all the time by doctor's orders, with deep mischief in the breathing parts, I don't quite see how I could be down to Oaktown shooting pheasants. But of course such a wicked devil as me can be in two places at once."

"We'll take you yet," answered Warren. "And I hope I may be the man to do it, Moleskin."

"For your own credit I'm sure I trust you may be. 'Twould be a great feather in your cap, Nicholas; though, to be frank, I'm not hopeful for you."

Presently the conversation returned to Mrs. Pomeroy and the thing that she had done.

"One supports her, and him a teetotaller—Matthew Northmore, in fact," said Joel.

"A man inclined to be very uncharitable," admitted Mr. Cawker. "Means well, I dare say, but terrible narrow-minded and quick to think evil."

"Miss Ruth dressed him down pretty sharp, however," answered Samuel Bolt. "My word! Her speech hummed about his ear like an angry appledrane." [1]

"She gave him hell, to say it in a word," declared Warren.

[1] *Appledrane* = a wasp.

"Quite right too," answered the poacher. "He hates Ives Pomeroy, and he hates me. Out of sheer friendship I offered to trap a few score rabbits for the man a bit ago; but he'd none of me. That's how I'm treated. And yet there's not a spark more evil in me than in Sammy Bolt here. Good plain dealers, both of us—just the sort of innocent fellows as would go fox-hunting with a pack of sheep! Ban't we, Sammy?"

But Mr. Bolt grew hot and indignant.

"I won't be classed with you, Cawker," he said. "You've done many things you can't look back upon, and you're not such an upright character as you say. No, it ban't fair to me to mention us in the same breath—it ban't fair."

"More it is," answered the poacher. "I quite grant that—such a good boy as you! Run along home, Sammy, to your fine red wife; or, if she don't want you, go to mother!"

Samuel departed in the sound of laughter, and Emmanuel Codd accompanied him. The night air cooled the younger man's anger and he returned to the great subject of the moment.

"What does Mr. Brown say?" asked Bolt presently. "Have he comforted them yet?"

"He was there when I left," answered Codd. "Can't say Arthur Brown comforted 'em much. He wants comfort himself more like."

"'Twas his business to cheer up poor Lizzie, surely?"

"Don't know what he thought about that. All he said to me was that it might be a very serious thing for a young man's future to marry into a family like the Pomeroys. But I dare say I shall catch even him out in something some day, for I've never met the man yet you couldn't trap

doing a dirty trick soon or late. You've only got to be patient and watchful, and the weakness of human nature will do the rest."

"He ought to have comforted her, I'm sure, and never spared a thought to himself at such a tragical time," declared Samuel.

CHAPTER XIV

AVISA AND RACHEL

MRS. POMEROY visited Rachel Bolt, whose cottage stood beside the way, over against Samuel's. Rachel, according to her custom, sat beside a front window, and when she saw the visitor, she rose and welcomed her.

"Haven't seed 'e this longful time, my dear; come in, come in. Us'll have a cup of tea. Thank the Lord you ban't one of they 'dash in, dash out' sort."

Partly from delicacy, chiefly from choice, the older woman made no mention of Ives, but dwelt on her own son and his wife.

"All goes well with them, I'm bound to say," she declared while they ate and drank presently. "'Twas certain that such a son should get a good wife. Yes—taking it all round—a good wife, Avisa; but that's not to say she's quite all I hoped and expected."

"No mother's ever satisfied in that quarter."

"Naturally; and with a man like my Samuel—however, I've got him still, and, after all, nothing else don't matter much. 'Tis curious that the girl should be clever in some ways and chuckle-headed in others. But so it is. That fainty weather with thunder in the air as we had a bit

ago acted very strangely upon her. She just went off three days running—once to her father and twice up on the Moor all alone. A lack of sense and patience; still, a good wife to Samuel; for I've got his own word, and he couldn't tell a falsehood for all the tin in Cornwall."

"That's right, then."

"The child will be a great arrival. No time lost. But Sam's set up his winter cough again, I'm sorry for to say, and when I mentioned it she showed temper."

"You must be reasonable, my dear. The girl can't help Samuel's cough."

"I don't say she can; yet she ought to be sorry about it, not cross with me for moaning over it a bit. What mother wouldn't? And knowing, too, that his father went off in a decline without rhyme or reason in his forties."

"Do she cook pretty well for him?"

"To be honest with you, she don't. I take my dinner along with them Sundays—always. 'Twas Sam's wish—not hers, I believe. But you can't be sure from week to week how the meat will go. Sometimes 'tis all anybody could wish, and sometimes 'tis quite the other way and beyond my poor teeth altogether. Yorkshire pudding she can't cook, and I've offered to show her how every Sunday since they was married; but she won't let me do it."

"She'll larn in time, be sure. Busy sewing, no doubt."

"Not she! When I remind her, as I do pretty near every day, 'tis always the same answer: 'Plenty of time, plenty of time.' I'm doing what I can on the quiet, only known to Samuel. She'll be thankful when the hour comes, but she'd be

angry if she knowed it now. Ban't a soft woman, you understand, Avisa. Hard as a flint, in fact, where you'd least expect it."

"I shouldn't have thought that."

"True, I assure 'e. Their cat chetted[1] last week, and if she didn't drown every one of 'em with her own hand under the yowling mother's nose! 'How could you go for to do it?' I axed her. 'Because your son wouldn't,' she said. 'Some person had to: us don't want six cats.'"

Mrs. Pomeroy laughed.

"I suppose that was true, Rachel."

"Of course, but 'twas the way she said it. 'Good Lord, Jill,' I answered her, 'your voice do make my flesh cream down my spine. 'Tis a voice that may be the voice of a woman who'd so soon drown a baby as a kitten!' Then she lost her temper, I'm sorry to say, and I left her."

Avisa's heart went out to Jill. She had never cared about the girl, but the recital of these events softened dislike to pity.

"So untidy too," said Mrs. Bolt. "You know what a man Samuel is—the pink of neatness in his person and everything. Washes to the waist every day of his life, and a hot bath on Saturday night. But she makes trouble even about that—some nonsense about the fire being let out and wanting to go to bed early, or something. But I don't interfere. I know a mother's place, thank God. Just a word in season to Samuel behind the scenes, but nothing more than that. He comes in and smokes his pipe of an evening now and again, for she's terrible fond of going to bed early. Not very civil to the man who works for her all day long; but so it is. And when she's

[1] *Chetted*=kittened.

washed up, she'll often leave him, so as he can't hear his own voice, or play her a tune on his flute; so naturally he comes across the road, where his voice and his flute be blessed music and always welcome."

Avisa nodded, and her friend read some admonishment into the gesture.

"Don't you think I don't like her, or any such thing. And I don't force my sense on her, Avisa—far from that. I merely look on and hold off. But lookers-on see most of the game, of course."

"That's just it," answered the other. "People don't like other eyes over their cards when they'm playing the game of life. If there's one thing more maddening than to be showed where you've played wrong by somebody out of the game, it is to know you've played wrong and to know that somebody else knows it too, but won't say a word."

"I'll say nought—not to her. I never will come between husband and wife that way. My son's love and worship be everything in the world that's left to live for, and if I shook him off me by saying a word against Jill I should die."

The other was silent for some time; then she spoke.

"If you've drunk your tea we'll go over and see the girl. I'd like to do it."

"Sorry I can't," confessed Mrs. Bolt. "I was in there this morning, and we didn't have words—God grant we never shall have—but I ventured to mention a baking powder I always used, owing to Samuel's digestion being not all one could wish; and she misunderstood and thought I was advising, and spoke rather short and said unkind things about Sam's inward parts. A mother couldn't

stand that, Avisa. So I just up and left her. And I've made up my mind not to call in again till to-morrow—just to mark I was hurt."

"Then I'll go alone," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Be very careful," urged her friend. "She's like a cat on hot bricks sometimes. Don't you advise nothing, whatever you may see that calls for altering. And you'll see a lot. But be blind to it, my dear, for Samuel's sake."

Avisa promised to exercise all possible caution, and presently went across the road, while Rachel watched nervously from her window.

"God send she'll be cautious and pick her words!" the old woman muttered to herself.

Jill was sulky at first, for she had seen Mrs. Pomeroy come from her mother-in-law's door. She dusted a chair and prepared to act on the defensive, but Avisa mentioned neither Mrs. Bolt nor Samuel: she concerned herself only with the woman, and was very glad to hear that Jill found herself well and hearty. The girl belied Rachel, for she was at work with her needle.

They spoke of the great business of maternity; then, since Avisa made no mention of the old woman over the way, Jill perversely prepared to do so. She stopped, however, and her thoughts chose another theme.

"I want to say, if you'll let me, that I've thought a terrible lot about you, Mrs. Pomeroy. 'Twas a very great sorrow to me—Ives. Because we were good friends once, you know, and he's a dear chap really, though reckless here and there. No sensible person will take much account of this, I reckon—anyway, I don't. I say such a lesson may be the making of Ives, and I hope it will be."

The mother's face brightened gently.

"Thank you for naming his name to me. 'Tis a word my ear be very hungry to hear, but few speak it now—out of mistaken kindness."

Jill was rather nervous and yet gratified at this avowal.

"Please the Lord he'll soon be back-along!" she said. "He's a very fine chap and only wants the sense that life will bring him. Fire ban't all a bad thing, as I know who have it, and too much of it. Wish my man felt a bit more of it. Good as gold, and meek as Moses, and patient as a donkey. 'Tis like nought but bread and milk at all your meals. Sometimes I wish to God he'd swear or slap my face, or do something to shake me up; but he's got no devil in him to do it."

"He'll wear well, however."

"His uncle won't die neither," said Jill drearily. "I tell you these things because you're an understanding woman, and don't turn up the whites of your eyes like the fools here if you be natural afore them and speak your mind. I married the man because I thought he'd get me out of poverty and make my life worth living. But his uncle's well enough to go up to Exeter and see a better doctor. And then, as if that wasn't enough, there's that old creature t'other side the road. I'd sooner have a thousand thorns in my flesh, or sleep on nettles, than be alongside her—always there—always there—tearing at my nerves!"

"I understand just how 'tis, Jill."

The girl's eyes glowed and the gathered wrongs of many days burst out of her heart.

"Cruel, hateful, blundering old idiot! No common sense, not a shred! To see her here—

even a man would pity me—any man but my man. She must be touching! Can't let even a blasted chair bide where I put it. Now she's watering the plants in the window; now she's up messing over Samuel's clothes; now I see her out of the corner of my eye looking at my darning, till often and often 'tis in me to scream at her and tell her for Christ's sake to get home. Then the questions she asks—sly questions she thinks I won't understand; but they all mean Samuel. Good God A'mighty! can I help the man coughing!"

"Can't Samuel do anything? Don't he see how 'tis?"

"Not him. He likes her better'n me. He goes sneaking in to her a many a night when he ought to spend his evening here. If she—but what's the use going on about it? Us must take the rough with the smooth and lie on the bed we've made ourselves."

"I'll see what I can think on."

"No, no, Mrs. Pomeroy. You've got your own business. 'Tis all right. Let things go. It have done me good to let off a bit of steam. I can stand it now; but I'm looking on ahead when the cheel comes. A mother's a very different thing to a childless creature, and I won't answer for what I may do if she begins upon the babby. I'm the eldest of eight myself, and I've done everything that can be done for 'em except bear 'em. So let her keep off that, or else . . . She's a silly old gawkim not to see my good points, though I say it."

"Allow for her age, Jill. Don't let her fret you more than you can help. And remember you be younger and stronger in the head than her.

May I see the house afore I go? If it ban't vitty, I'll come again."

"See it and welcome."

Mrs. Pomeroy praised a little and commended Jill in certain particulars. She stopped until Samuel came home, and presently left the young couple in a most amiable frame of mind with themselves and their treasures.

"A very nice woman," said the man.

"Yes," answered Jill, "and I'll tell you for why: she makes you respect yourself, and 'tis a peaceful feeling. I wish I felt so oftener."

Samuel nodded.

"But I wish she was a thought more like my dear parent—more heart to her—eh, Jill?"

CHAPTER XV

THE WEATHER-GLEAM

LIZZIE AND HER MOTHER prepared for Ives on the day that his sentence ended. Avisa busied herself with many things; the girl saw chiefly to her brother's room, made it tidy, set his few books in order, and put a little bunch of chrysanthemums on the table. As evening came the excitement grew, and even old Mrs. Pomeroy could not sit still in her chair. Thrice she secretly slipped out to the garden to see whether her grandson was coming home through the twilight; then her granddaughter found her and called her in.

"He won't be here yet," she said. "I lay he'll come in on the quiet long after we be all to bed."

"More like he won't come at all," answered Jane, sorry to be caught. "Don't you think I'm looking for him, Lizzie. He's gone for a soldier, in my opinion, or worse still, took to the sea. Your trouble's wasted: he'll never come back."

Yet in her old heart she too expected him, and greatly longed to see him.

The labourers were not doubtful; for Johnson inclined towards hope, while Emmanuel Codd

most stoutly declared that Ives need not be expected. He would never return to his home.

"Take it how you please," he said. "The stiff neck of the chap will keep him from coming back. He'll have thought out what he's going to do while he was to Tavistock, and it won't be to walk in here as if he'd only been away for a holiday."

And Mr. Codd was right.

Until twelve o'clock the household sat up for Ives. Then all retired, and last among them Avisa also went to bed. She hoped that the wanderer might be waiting for the lights to vanish. She left hot food below and opened a little window at the rear of the house, which was the usual entrance-way of Ives after dark. But he did not come.

Two nights later hope woke at the sound of a late visitor, but the treble knock told of Arthur Brown; and, for the first time in her life, Lizzie regretted that it was her sweetheart and not another who had arrived.

"I had much wished to welcome your brother," said the schoolmaster. "But I fear my opinions have proved correct. Has anything been heard of him?"

"Nothing. He was free on Monday morning, and now 'tis Wednesday night, and no news."

Brown sighed.

"The fools bring all the trouble into the world," he said. "How does Mrs. Pomeroy bear it?"

"She's herself—goes about everything as usual and leaves supper every night. She says he won't be long—seems hopeful still."

The young man shook his head.

"She doesn't understand human nature, Lizzie.

I have studied Ives pretty closely, as you know. Everything that is interesting to you is interesting to me, of course. I never thought to have much to do with such an irregular man; but he's your brother, and it's my duty to try and help him —for my own sake, understand, as well as for yours."

"I only hope you'll have the chance to help him, Arthur. He swore he wouldn't come home; we've got to remember that."

"I attach no importance to his swearing," answered the schoolmaster. "These characters that live without God don't think anything of an oath, I'm sorry to say. Personally I should not wonder if he entered upon a period of reckless living."

"You can't do that without money, and he's got none," answered Lizzie.

They went in together, and Mr. Brown talked with Avisa. He ventured to caution her against her sanguine attitude, and she listened patiently; then she prepared a little supper for her son as usual.

"You may be right, but I don't think it. If I know anything he's not far off. He'll come back presently. 'Tis like taming a shy creature home again after it have once broke loose. There was something moving nigh the house long after dark last night, and I think I know who 'twas."

"It's all so mad and senseless," grumbled the other. "Twenty-five years old and behaving in a way that would be weak-headed if he was twelve. I couldn't have done such things in my childhood, Mrs. Pomeroy."

"I'm sure you couldn't," she said. "But it

takes all sorts to make a world—savage and tame. Some be quickly ripe and a credit to their company from their youth up; some calls for wild weather to ripen 'em. Trust me to know."

Then she rose and left the lovers together. It was her custom to make large excuses for all natures and struggle to find the best in all; but her daughter's future husband tried her a little. He belonged to a sort of character that weak human nature admires most at a distance.

"He shines like a lighthouse, but you can't warm your hands at him," Mrs. Pomeroy once confessed to Peter Toop.

Anon Mr. Brown took his leave; and that night a strange thing happened. The dog of Ives barked loudly and joyfully after one o'clock, and the voice of Ives bade it be silent. His mother heard him from her chamber and marked by little familiar sounds every incident that followed. Breathless, with her bedroom door ajar, she listened, heard the back window opened, marked the footfall in the kitchen.

Beneath was the usual preparation: a lamp turned low, a hot meal put by, plate and glass, knife and fork, and a few words on a piece of paper.

"Supper in the oven, dear heart. Good night.—MOTHER."

With straining ears she listened, but did not go down to him. She heard stealthy movements and once the clink of glass. Then, after half an hour had passed, the man went out as quietly as he had entered; the window closed; the dog barked again; Ives had come and gone.

But wordless thanksgivings filled his mother's

heart. She was sure of him now, and that night she slept as she had not slept since he departed.

At dawn she went down to feast on the sight of his empty plate and the mark of his boots on the floor.

"God bless the child," she said to Lizzie. "My word, what a supper he made!"

She was looking about in the fender and on the floor for the scraps of her note which she expected to find; and then, to her daughter's surprise, the mother's voice shook and she clasped the girl's hand very tight and pressed a sudden emotion into it.

"Mother!" cried Lizzie, "what's come over 'e? How beautiful your eyes shine!"

"He's took my little letter away with him!" whispered Avisa. "He's forgiven me, Lizzie! 'Tis a weather-gleam from the sky for all our hearts!"

Then Mrs. Pomeroy disappeared; and her daughter, greatly wondering, made breakfast ready.

The next night Ives showed no sign; and then he came home altogether. Again his dog barked after one in the morning, and again he returned to his home. He ate his supper, listened to the clock purr two, and heard the gentle rustle of the blackbeetles by the hearth. Then, having eaten and drunk, he took off his boots, lighted a candle, and went up to his own room. His mother kept silence, and it was not until deep sleep had sunk upon him that she crept to his door to hear his breathing.

CHAPTER XVI

PETER TAKES THE PLUNGE

PETER TOOP had been exceedingly busy over an extension of his business, and now was a mortuary mason as well as undertaker. Henceforth he was prepared to do all that the living can do for the dead.

From these new operations Peter's thoughts again turned towards Ruth Rendle. He told himself that the time was ripe for action, and various circumstances combined to promote activity. First he found that stronger spectacles became necessary to him; and this deterioration of sight pointed to the approach of waning powers in other directions. Secondly, he met with Avisa Pomeroy, and she said a word that spurred him to the definite deed.

The undertaker did not regard Ruth's acquiescence as certain. He felt hopeful, but he was more modest than Joel and regarded refusal as a possibility.

Then came chance speech with Mrs. Pomeroy, and he acted upon it.

They met near Christmas opposite the new tombstone works, and Mr. Toop insisted upon Avisa entering, that she might see some pieces of marble he had acquired at a bankrupt's sale.

"From Italy," he said. "God knows I don't want sorrow to come to anybody in particular this winter; but there it is—a very satisfying piece of stone, in my judgment."

She admired the marble, and he ventured on a suggestion.

"I suppose it never struck you to put up a richer monument over Mr. Pomeroy?"

"No," she said. "The Pomeroy headstones lie in a row and be all slate."

"I've nothing against slate," he admitted. "But marble makes a graveyard more showy, and so betters the general character of a district. It often means a deeper grief also."

"If grief is a matter of cash, it does," she said.

"I pore over pictures of tombs and their prices of an evening for hours. Upon the whole, I reckon too much is charged for gravestones, ma'am."

"Very like. There's trades that be called upon just when sorrowful hearts think least of pounds and shillings."

"Not that anybody ever has, or ever will have, any cause to grumble at me," declared Peter. "The letters that I've got after funerals will make a proud heirloom for my children."

"So they will, then—a very kind-hearted, feeling man, as we all know."

"And how might Ives be?"

"He's well and busy about a good few things. Our oak wood comes down next year. 'Twill be a great year for us."

"And bark was up a bit in the market last spring. I've had a word or two with your son over the bar. Always took to his fearless way

myself, though he've got wrong opinions still, to say it kindly."

"Who hasn't at his age? There's some wrong opinions I like a boy to hold. The world may stamp them out pretty quick, but they show a good fashion of heart."

"As to the world, Ives would seem to think that 'tis all to the young," mused Mr. Toop. He sat on a granite kerbstone and took snuff as he spoke.

"So 'tis to the young," she answered; "and so it always will be, Peter."

"Not at all; not at all. Such an idea teaches the young people to be selfish. Grey 'airs don't count a button nowadays."

She shook her head.

"The young be in a hurry. So was we back-along. 'Tis only the old, with no time left, that take time easily and understand it. Them with their lives before 'em be always short of time if they're good for anything. Patience ban't natural to girls and boys."

"That's true," he admitted. "Nobody knows that better than me with my young, boyish mind. The way I dash at things fairly frightens my brother every day of the week."

"Us can over-do patience without a doubt," she said; and Mr. Toop applied this sentiment to his own case.

"I believe you're right," he answered. "Now, though younger than ever in most ways, I can't deny that I've had to get a stronger pair of glasses."

"The natural fires get cool as time works with us."

"With some, with some; not with all. There's

such men as Joel who feel the pinch, and they weak-chested sort often seem to show time's handiwork sharper than others. But in my case, when time took my hair—which was a trifle, and I'm healthier in summer without it—he 'peared to forget all about me. I've been a man, you must know, who never would get into ruts and grooves, Mrs. Pomeroy. I'm the donkey as likes to sample both sides of the hedge, my dear."

She declared this rule of life to be a very wise one, then left him; but he reflected for some time concerning what she had said, and her opinion: that danger might lie in over-much patience, finally decided Peter upon an active step.

Joel was bronchitic next Sunday and did not go to church. Therefore Peter had Ruth to himself for a while, and as they journeyed home from evensong at Sampford Spiney, he asked her to marry him.

"You're no longer a child," he said, "and more am I, Ruth. You're in the full vigour of womanhood, and I'm a man at the top of his prosperity and hard as a nut in wind and limb. And though coffins and gravestones ban't lovely material, yet love's love, and money's money, and I never met the love as went the worse for a bit of cash thrown in. You've got to balance my mature brow and spectacles against the useful odds of always knowing where to go for a ten-pound note. So there you are, my dear. Take it or leave it; but I hope to God you'll take it."

She refused him gently and with very sincere and grateful thanks for the honour that he had paid her.

He took it calmly, but could not conceal his disappointment.

"A crusher," he said. "However, it's got to go down. Well, you know your own business best, my dear. But if by lucky chance you change . . ."

"Find somebody wiser and better and a thought older than me. Your kind heart blinds you where I'm concerned."

"Everything seems to go against the order of nature lately," he said. "Not perhaps that 'twas in nature for you to care for me; but so it is. Two nights ago Matthew Northmore came in the bar—that evening you was with Mrs. Pomeroy—and had a whisky hot! Never seed the man take a dram before in my life. He was wet to the skin and shivering, it is true; still he's always spoken against whisky before. Then there's Moleskin; since young Pomeroy's trouble and his own illness, he's changing; a leopard will change its spots next. I'll allow that he generally says something about reformation after the fishing season's over; but never before so serious as this year."

"Was it along with him that Ives bided those nights afore he came home?"

"Yes; but leave that. I can't talk of common things as if nought had happened."

"You must apply yourself to this like everything else," she told him. "Such an energetic popular man as you can find the right wife easily enough."

"I thought I had," he answered. "You mustn't think I've got no heart. 'Twill be months afore I can begin to look round again."

"Don't let it be months, cousin Peter."

"Something tells me it will be some dead man's leavings now," he said gloomily. "I'd high hopes of you, Ruth, but, failing you, I shan't

think no more of the maidens. I was a young man afore I offered myself to you; now I feel ten year older and haven't got the heart to hope for anything above a widow."

"You'll find just the right one—and I'll help you if I can."

"My business be more likely to help me. I suppose that Providence knew you'd say 'no,' Ruth; and so it led me to the tombstones. I'll find some weeping creature presently, I suppose, and say the word in season. Not that I look forward to it with much appetite at present. However, you'll always be a friend—eh, Ruth?"

"Always a true, loving friend, cousin. I don't forget, and never shall forget, how much I owe you."

"Then keep your eyes open on my account. And there's just one thing. I've no right to dictate, but I'm human, and I know you'll marry somebody sooner or late—such a fine girl naturally will do so—but I must ask you, out of respect to me, Ruth, not to take Joel. You may say I've no right to warn you off him; and as to 'right,' perhaps I have not. But I'm a stickler for law and order and propriety in general, and it wouldn't be at all nice having refused the younger man to take the older. I'm sure your good sense sees that. So I must ask you once for all not to take Joel."

"I promise faithfully," she answered.

A week later Ruth, after certain conferences with those who wished her well, decided to leave the inn, since her presence there had thrown this shadow upon the proprietors.

Northmore it was who first urged the step. She met him in a downcast mood.

"I know you care, and I know you're wise," she said. "The truth is that Peter and Joel both like me, and they quarrel over me and say unkind things to me about each other. I believe they'd be glad if I was to go really, but are far too kind to say it."

"Leave them," he answered, and his heart felt a throb of hope. "Let me do what I can. I've friends in business. If you must work, let me try and get something for you."

"No, no. I can find work, I think. The point is to leave here. I think a lot of your opinion, Mr. Northmore — yours and Mrs. Pomeroy's. You say 'go.' I'll ask her too, and see if she says the same."

The man took the opportunity and pleaded his cause again. He showed how simple a way led from the difficulty and ended at Stone Park; but she could not take that road.

CHAPTER XVII

REFORMATION

ON THE SUNDAY that followed Christmas Day, Arthur Brown and Ives Pomeroy walked from Sampford Spiney together homeward. A very amazing circumstance had upset the spirit of the congregation, for there appeared at church one who was never known before to visit it, and his advent banished both somnolence and devotion from the little company of worshippers. All, even to the school-children, experienced a thrill and flutter before the spectacle of Moleskin in the house of prayer. Mary Cawker accompanied her father, and she was obviously excited and hysterical, for this triumph in her own opinion largely belonged to Mary. After service the poacher and his daughter were not seen; they entered the vestry and stopped there until the people had dispersed.

Arthur Brown felt this event might happily form matter for improving reflections, and spoke to his future brother-in-law as they proceeded home to dinner at Vixen Tor Farm.

"It shows how none is forgotten," he said. "It seems to me to prove that God watches and waits His own time, and then, when the soul is ripe and ready, He makes His way into it and

the still small voice speaks to a man. You came to sense and reason by being chastened, Ives—at least, all who care for you are hoping so; and even this bad old man has apparently seen the light at last."

Ives sneered.

"That's what you think. Anyway, you were the only man that ever had the mean mind to say one single word to me on the subject after I came home again."

"I felt it my duty to do so," answered the schoolmaster.

"It's your inclination oftener than your duty that makes you so damned nasty to people."

"You always try and raise anger in me, and you never succeed," said Mr. Brown. "You are selfish, and don't see what a serious thing your disgrace has been for me. I have some self-respect, if you have none, and I tell you candidly that I thought twice about any union with your family last autumn."

"Did you? Well, take my advice and don't think three times. You're under contract to marry my sister, I believe, and the little fool fancies that you are a model man and a hero, and God knows what else. And you will marry her. You'll marry her in due season, or I'll break your neck for you."

"Don't think I fear you," answered the other. "Very far from that, I assure you. There is nothing about you that an intellectual man need fear."

"You marry my sister, that's all. Let me hear one word more about us not being good enough, and you'll wish you hadn't been born."

"Really, you're a hopeless man — perfectly

hopeless. 'Reformation!' It's ridiculous to apply the word to you."

"Who did?" asked the other. "Damn reformation! Who that have got to run up against you every week would reform? 'Tis your sort made Christ's self lose His temper. And well He might!"

"I hope that Mr. Cawker will take higher views in future," said Brown.

"Higher views! He's often thought of doing this in the winter, when there's nothing going on. He's having a lark, I'll bet. All you sheep-faced people rolling your eyes and whispering, and him laughing fit to burst in his sleeve, I'll swear."

Mrs. Pomeroy was unwell and had not come to church. Ives asked after her immediately on his return home, learned that she was not better, and relapsed into gloom. Avisa dined with the company; then she retired to her room. Mrs. Jane Pomeroy went to sleep; the lovers walked out together, and Ives, slightly curious to know the truth concerning Moleskin, went up the hill to visit his friend.

It seemed that the cynical theory of Ives was erroneous, for Mr. Cawker took himself very seriously. Humility and triumph strove for mastery in his mind, and young Pomeroy found himself at a loss.

"All straight, this here wonderful reformation?" he asked.

"Solemn truth, my son. When you came out of clink—to say it as one sinner to another—I watched to see what you'd do, and marked that you began to run straight and stand steadily to work. 'Twas a noble sight and did more than one backslider good, I promise you."

"More fools them. I didn't stand to work more than I chose, and never shall. With my opinions . . ."

"Drop 'em! drop 'em," said Moleskin earnestly. "Do like me and give over them devilish ideas about equality and the land to the poor. 'Tis all wrong, Ives; and, old though I am, I see it. The rich be the act of God, and He have planned that their first care be the poor. It ban't for us to help ourselves: 'tis for them to help us. 'Tis their privilege and duty to look after the meek and lowly. The Lord put 'em here to do it. And we must give 'em every opportunity."

Pomeroy stared; then he laughed.

"Don't make that noise," said the poacher. "Lord knows, looking back, I can't see much to laugh at, anyway."

"I should think you was weeping drunk if I didn't know," said Ives.

"No, no; only enough for health in future. What was it I said to parson in the vestry a bit ago, Mary?"

"You said such a terrible lot to him," answered his daughter proudly; "words flowed out of you like feathers off a goose."

Ives marked the attitude of Moleskin's women. His wife was very silent. She seemed absolutely sceptical and, from her couch, watched the reformed sinner with unsympathetic eyes; but Mary evidently felt the glow and glory of this noble change.

"I put it plain afore parson," continued Moleskin. "I said: 'Until now, your reverence, I've been like the moon and only shone by night —God forgive me for it. But never again— no more works of darkness for me,' I said. 'All

be changed,' I told him; and then I give this here woman credit for it, because I must tell you, Pomeroy, that Mary be largely answerable for my salvation. 'Twas just after Christmas dinner that her fell upon me like a cat-a-mountain—not with her claws, but with her tongue. In fact, she bally-ragged me proper; yet not her, but the voice of the Lord speaking through her. I didn't sleep at all that night, and with morning light I fetched out this here black coat: a sign of grace, though the moth was in it. However, 'twill do very well Sundays till I've made some honest money and can buy a new one."

"Honest money's easier to talk about than to earn for the likes of you, Cawker," said his wife coldly.

"Don't you think that," he said. "If there's joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, as parson told me to-day, so much the more should there be joy among a sinner's own fellow-creatures. I've a perfect right to expect good work and good wages now. 'Tis the duty and glory of the neighbourhood to give 'em to me; I demand 'em."

"Parson kept harping on the past, however," said Mary. "Then father got a bit tired of that and up and told him that the past was over and that it didn't become a Christian man to go back to it any more."

"I did," answered Mr. Cawker. "He couldn't get off the poaching, and he also reminded me as I used to sing naughty songs for money here and there, and so on, and so on. But I said: ''Tis the most Christian way to forget all about that; and for my part, I shall be the first to do so.'"

Ives roared with laughter; Moleskin looked aggrieved; and Mary spoke indignantly.

"You didn't ought to take it so, Mr. Pomeroy. You're worse than mother."

"As for me," answered the sick woman, "I've knowed father a good few years longer than what either of you have. If talk was religion, I'd be the first to take a hopeful view. But as it ban't, I won't pretend what I don't feel."

"You'm a rummy old jibes!" said the poacher. "And you be quite right not to trust me. An itemy [1] man—to my shame I say it. But I shall go to work with the best, so soon as the Lord do find my task."

Ives scoffed again.

"'Twill take parson all his time to get you a straight job, old chap."

"So he seemed to think," confessed Mary; but her father would not allow this.

"Not at all; you're quite mistook," he answered. "I grant that at first he was a thought taken too when I comed in the vestry and demanded honest work from the Lord's minister. But after I'd talked to him a bit he quite saw it in the proper light; and he's going to stir himself at once. The labourer is worthy of his hire, however, and I made that quite clear to his reverence."

Moleskin sighed, lit his pipe, and mended the fire.

"'Tis a very gracious and comforting feeling to throw your cares on another pair of shoulders," he said. "If I'd known what 'twas to reform, I make no doubt but I should have done it long ago. You go on with it too, Ives."

[1] *Itemy* = tricky.

"Us'll live to see you a sidesman yet, and teaching in the Sunday school, perhaps," said the younger man; "but they won't let you take round the money dish, I'm afraid—not yet awhile."

"Don't laugh no more," urged the poacher. "'Tis bad enough for my own wife to feel doubts about me holding out, let alone you."

Mary was going into Merivale presently, and Ives returned with her.

"Tell me," said Pomeroy, as he and Mary went down the hill; "is this really true? He seemed in sober earnest—for him."

"True enough," she said, "and I'm responsible for it. I be terrible anxious for it to go right; yet there's a doubt in my mind that his reformation ban't built on solid ground. It comed about in a very curious fashion. 'Twas like this here: just after Christmas dinner, something woke in me and, after mother had shed a few tears, I found my tongue for once, and up and spoke to father straight from the heart. I won't deny that there was a pinch of temper too, for the very goose we'd ate comed from a doubtful place, and somebody had bred and raised it for nought but his trouble. 'You'm a cruel, wicked old shaver!' I said to my father—'a sinful, scandalous, ancient man as be a shame to the countryside; and well you know it. I wouldn't be you for all the world,' I said; 'and some night you'll be took off, like a bird off a tree. And if you come to be knocked over the head with all your terrible outrageous sins upon you, where d'you think you'll spend eternity, you woeful man?' I kept running on like that, fiercer and fiercer; and first father was astonished a good bit, and

then he gived off laughing; and finally, by the grace of God, he seed what I was driving at and decided to be saved. But the point is this, Mr. Pomeroy: 'twasn't the Lord in me, but three whole glasses of brown sherry wine, as I drank down along with that stolen goose. It got in my blood, and in my head, and I felt that I must have a dash at something and keep talking for dear life, or else I'd roll over on the floor; so I had a dash at father. But if he found out where my valour rose from, I'm very much afraid the old man would turn back again to-morrow."

"No, he wouldn't," declared Ives; "he's going to see if the game of repentance be worth the candle. But he can't change at his time of life."

They parted, and Ives returned home. He found his mother still in some discomfort, and forgot the great incident of the day in his solicitude for her. It was decided he should drive Avisa to Tavistock on the following morning, that her indisposition might be examined and explained. This return of fears forgotten cast gloom upon the hearts at Vixen Tor.

CHAPTER XVIII

GREAT MIS TOR

FROM THE ROCKY BREAST of Great Mis Tor on a day in spring, those many miles that separated this little mountain from the sea stretched but as a span. Crushed by perspective, whole parishes huddled together like the sections of a child's puzzle map. Forests were a thumbnail; rivers traversed the expanse in bright threads; fields appeared but as cubes and lozenges spattered upon this mosaic; while hamlets and homesteads shrank to mere points dotted upon the undulations of the land. Only the horizons of the sea were huge, where the little scroll of the earth ended and the waters rolled. They and the actual Moor itself were immense; but the inhabited regions between them appeared reduced almost to nothing by the sleights of space. The cloud shadows that swept it with wandering islands of purple brightened the glitter of the sunshine by contrast with their gloom; and between these fleeting shades the light fell in a rain of splendour and ran along rivers, illuminated lofty wastes, brought out unguessed knaps and points, flashed stars from far-off waterfalls, faded and misted in mellow hazes above the vision of the sea.

Spring did not forget the high Moor. Her swift feet had trodden the waste and left warm pressure of their passing, so that the pallor of the winter herbage waned. There spread a glow of genial russet amid the rocks, and the whortle put on the red of life—a hue very different from the red of death that autumn summons. Each spike of unfolding foliage blushed to its top and made a ruddy harmony with the drooping blossom bells.

Ives Pomeroy was returning from fishing, and now he stayed a while and screwed up his eyes that he might make out a figure that approached him. She was a woman, and first he failed to recognise her, and then, as she approached to within a quarter of a mile of him, he knew her.

The young man's life progressed unevenly. He was wayward, now fluttered hope in those who cared for him, now awakened depression, or anger, or indifference. The folk were tolerant for his mother's sake, and she, pursuing the way of her own heart, swiftly recognised any flash of larger ambition, riper knowledge, and ampler patience in his nature. She seldom erred, and the improvements that she discerned were often genuine; but some of these dawns were false, and occasionally a harsh sequel followed indications of advancement. He possessed no stability and was hard to live with. Little reverence belonged to him, but his mother knew that love of justice formed a staple of his character. And upon this she built.

Avisa had suffered physical trials during this early spring, and was but lately returned home after undergoing an operation at Tavistock

Cottage Hospital. She mended now, and the neighbours rejoiced to know it.

Jill Bolt approached young Pomeroy, and his first thought was to plunge off the footpath and put some distance between them; then curiosity changed his intention and he determined to hold on and pass her. They met, as they had sometimes met of late before. On these occasions Ives regarded Jill and she turned her face from him; but to-day he was astonished to find that she returned his glance; then she stopped; and then she spoke.

He had not heard her voice for many months and it moved him somewhat. Moreover, the tone was humble and the words were meek.

"May I speak to you, Mr. Pomeroy?" she said.

"Yes, you may," he answered. "I've seed you once or twice out here. Why for have you took to roaming, Mrs. Bolt?"

"I suppose you wouldn't be so kind as to call me 'Jill' again?"

He did not answer, and she continued.

"I walk for two reasons: because my husband's mother be always at me to take exercise and keep tramping for my coming little one's sake; and because I like it."

He listened to the sound rather than to the sense of her speech.

He nodded with his mother's nod.

"Sit here," he said. "'Twas a black day for you when you quarrelled with me, Jill."

"I know it."

"And a black day for me. A man like me ban't built to be thrown over that way without

paying somebody. You'd set me festering and the poison had to out."

"I beg you to forgive me, Mr. Pomeroy."

"There's been enough damned nonsense between us, and it's wrecked my life and gone far to spoil yours. But you can call me 'Ives,' I suppose. I forgive you, of course. No use to do otherwise."

She looked at his profile as he sat beside her with his face turned to the summit of Great Mis Tor.

"You've suffered only less than me," she said. "Why was I born to make you an unhappy man? Such impatience—such cruel, wicked pride. Oh, my God, what a fool I was!"

He hesitated, then spoke.

"You was a woman and the weaker thing. You was very much tempted, and I ought to have seen it at the time and been more patient. I cut my own throat, in a manner of speaking. Moleskin showed me that when 'twas too late, and he knows a lot about women."

"The fault was mine, and the punishment be mine also."

"As to that . . ."

"I know you missed me a bit; but you've got the world to choose from; you're free. I'm done for."

He was interested and marked her hopeless voice.

"'Done for!' That's a hard saying. I suppose you'll have what you took him for—his uncle's money?"

"Blast the money! That's gone, and I'm cruel punished ever for thinking of it; though, all the same, God's my judge that 'twasn't love

of the money first, but anger at you made me take him. But living with him! If you or any other man only knowed the nature of Samuel! He's invalid food, that man! He makes me sick, I tell you—sick. You, that be all up and down, and sulks and laughter and anger and red-hot worship—you that I know so well, for all we're parted for ever—you can't understand what 'tis to be like him. He ought to be in heaven, and I wish to God he was. Nothing to find fault with—but everything. I hate goodness since I married that man. I hate patience and meekness and giving way to everybody—like hell I hate 'em! Never an unkind thought of any living creature. Never a bit of news—never even a crooked word. There, I could shriek out swear words myself sometimes to anger him, but 'twould be in vain. And his awful flute—like a lost lamb bleating for its mother. I'd thank God on my knees if he'd come home drunk and beat me for a change—anything—anything's better for body and soul—both."

"That's him right enough," admitted Ives. "I always said, and always will say, you was a red rat marrying a white mouse. You had a fine flame in you always. With that fiery hair, you was bound to be hot."

He looked at her great mane and was silent.

"Nothing like it nowheres else," he said, being shaken from the matter in hand by this physical splendour. "Lovely as ever. I'd have been a better father for that child coming than him; and a better husband for you than him."

His frankness did not disconcert her. She sighed and asked after his mother.

"I hope Mrs. Pomeroy be strong again?"

"Yes, she is; but not all we could wish yet. Doctor says we must look sharp after her for a year or two at least. However, she'll soon be herself again, I think. The doctors say she made a splendid recovery, and tell us we've every right to hope that she'll never fall so ill again. All the same, there's a little fear."

"I wish some of they doctors wasn't such fools. Do you mind when you gave it to me, Ives, because you said I was marrying Bolt for his hopes of money?"

"Better leave that now," he said.

"Anyway, us won't get it."

"Why not?"

"Because his uncle ban't going to die!"

"He must die sooner or later."

"He's only sixty or thereabout, and the London doctor found as he hadn't got death in him at all. 'Twas his liver; and now the man eats proper meat and takes long walks and so on, and he's getting spryer every day."

"Your luck's out all round, then."

"'Tis a poor plight. Sometimes I feel that desperate that I could run away or cut my throat —anything to get out of it."

"Time will tame you—same as it will me."

"Never!"

"Winter and wedlock tames maids and beasts. You was far too fine a piece for a poor ninny-hammer like Bolt. Still it might be worse. I suppose he does your bidding. I dare say he'd have made a better husband than me—here and there."

She put her hand on his.

"Don't say that, Ives."

"Leave your hand where 'tis," he said, with a voice unsteady.

For a time neither spoke; then Jill rose.

"Us better not meet no more. It puts wicked thoughts in me," she said quietly.

"Wicked be damned. Half the things men call wicked be no more than natural. Everything that be worth thinking about be wicked, if you listen to they forsaken people as call themselves good."

"I'll go on my way and you get home."

He opened his creel, took out some trout, made a neat parcel of them with brake-fern and rushes, then tied all with a piece of string.

"There," he said. "Good-bye! Keep up your pluck. You never know what may happen."

"Good-bye and thank you, Ives."

He turned his back upon her and went his way, while she did not move for some time. From under her pale eyelashes she watched him dwindle. She knew a great deal about his past, and was familiar with his behaviour in the present. People began to regard him as an amended young man. He kept more at home and worked harder at his business. With regard to women none could say that he specially affected any girl's society for the moment. Jill thought of what she had lost and what she had gained. Upon the whole this interview cheered her a good deal. She wished that her child would come quickly; and in her heart she hoped that it would quickly go again.

Ives Pomeroy fell in with Ruth Rendle on his homeward way, and since she was proceeding to Vixen Tor Farm to see his mother, he escorted her. He appeared very full of the griefs of Jill Bolt and uttered a flood of indignant protests.

He scorned the woman's husband and declared that her mother-in-law was enough to make any sane wife commit a crime. The subject entirely possessed his mind, and he made no secret of his recent conversation.

"A cruel thing for any proper-spirited woman to be choked between them two stupid creatures. There'll be a flare-up presently, if I know anything about her."

He ranted on at the unutterable misery of Jill, and Ruth listened while Ives vented many lawless opinions and for the time being gave no indications whatever of his alleged advance in sense and sobriety. She was glad when they reached the farm and he left her with Mrs. Pomeroy. But this he did not do until he had described his interview to his mother and poured Jill's wrongs into Avisa's ears.

And his old sweetheart sat on till daylight waned. Then, like an enchanter, the mighty tor began to weave its own cloud-cap before her eyes and draw down from the firmament a nimbus of dark vapours. There was no wind and the fog increased, filled Walla's deep glen beneath the tor, and came presently to the face of the woman where she still sat and pondered. At its touch, the sense of reality returned to her brooding spirit. She banished certain dreams that painted another pattern of life than the true one, sighed impatiently, and turned to go home.

Samuel was waiting for his supper, and when she showed him the trout and told him the name of the giver her husband appeared too much astonished to say anything.

"You'd better go in and ax your mother if

I ought to eat 'em or not," she said, guessing that he would miss the satire.

"A very proper thought, Jill. I will do so," he answered. "For my part, as a large-minded man I can't see no cause against. But mother, aggravating to you though she may be sometimes, have sense enough for the pair of us still. If she says the fish did ought to be ate, you can have 'em for breakfast; if not, I'll give 'em to somebody else and tell Pomeroy that I've done so. Of course, he'll see the hidden meaning of that and take the hint in future."

"You may save yourself the trouble," answered his wife. "There's some things still as I dare to make up my own mind about, and I'm going to eat these fish for my supper."

Samuel looked rather nervous, and his mouth opened while he reflected.

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "'Tisn't as if he'd catched 'em deliberate for you. That I would not have stood for a moment. But since you met by accident and the fish was caught, and the idea to give you a few comed in his mind, 'twas a sort of peace-offering, poor man, and I hope a sign of grace. But I'll take none. You cook 'em, Jill, and keep the three biggest for yourself, and I'll pop over to mother with the rest."

CHAPTER XIX

A THUNDER PLANET

SOME DIFFERENCES of opinion between the brothers Toop culminated in words on a day in August. The matter concerned Ruth, who had, after long hesitation, told them that she intended to leave Merivale. This startling decision was now in their ears, and they discussed it. Both felt guilty; each knew the other's secret, for both had confessed.

"She's *not* going," said Peter positively. "If I'm anybody here, she's not going to leave the Jolly Huntsmen."

"So far as that goes, I don't want her to leave any more than you do."

There came the sound of a galloping horse, and both, glancing from the window, saw Matthew Northmore ride past on his way to Tavistock.

"Wonder how that man put it to her," mused Joel. "For put it he did. I've very little doubt that he offered himself—maybe more than once."

"I hadn't thought of him."

"I'll tell you the sober truth," continued Joel with gathering excitement. "Ban't us that have made that girl want to go: 'tis yonder man! He's plaguing her with his long face and won't take

'no' for an answer. Mark me, 'tis him, not me or you, that be driving her away."

Joel was obviously comforted by this reflection. One might have observed the balm of a restored self-respect oozing up into his face. Peter agreed with him and congratulated him on his perception.

"It only remains to stop him bothering her and make it worth her while to bide along with us," he said. "And that I'll do, if money can do it. But the money will be my affair. I be going to give her five shillings a week out of my private cash, Joel."

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"If you feel called to fling away your money . . ."

"Yes, I do. What's money to me? I don't suppose I shall marry at all now. And, anyway, even if I change my mind and the right one comes along, five shillings a week won't break me."

"I shall marry myself, and very soon too, if 'tis only to read that woman a lesson," said Joel. "Seen as I am, none can picture the husband I'll be; but when the deed is done and I've took a wife and blessed her with my substance, then Ruth's eyes will be opened and she'll begin to understand what she's missed."

"That's spiteful," declared Peter. "However, go your way. Come in the bar and we'll tell her what I've decided to do."

Voices, however, fell upon their ears as they approached, and Ruth did not learn her good fortune until the evening.

It was seldom that Samuel Bolt appeared as a morning customer, but upon this sultry day he came to drink. There was much upon his

mind, and he found a sympathetic listener in Ruth.

"I may be a father any minute now," said Samuel. "The time has come and I live in a bath of presspiration, to tell the truth. Jill's that calm that my mother says 'tis out of nature and all against the cheel. Jill might have done her part better, I must say. My mother told me what was right, and I told Jill. But my mother was a lot too wise to tell Jill herself." He broke off and emptied his mug. "A drop more cider," he said. "I'm rather down-daunted to-day. There's a thunder planet reigning, I reckon, or else such things couldn't be. I pray God us shan't have a frightful storm afore my child be born."

"I hope all your trouble will soon be changed into happiness," said Ruth.

"I'm sure I hope it will," he answered. "But to be secret with you, my dear, there are times when I get very much niffed and that vexed, I could almost stamp my foot or use a wrong word. The most cruel thing that ever happened to me fell out last Friday morning."

"I'm very sorry, Samuel."

"You'd be sorrier still if you heard." He hesitated, then spoke. "I'll tell you—yes, I will, because it may be a lesson to you. Of course you know my mother's great care never to say or do anything that can possibly vex my wife."

"I'm sure 'tis so."

"Well, o' Thursday, when I was to work, they had words, and my mother went back to her own house more determined than ever to do nothing that anybody could say was interference. I had

a tell with her in the evening and heard the particulars. 'Twas some items about the nurse, which I couldn't be expected to follow. But Jill had told my mother that my mother was near forty years behind the times in the matter of child-bearing. And mother told me that never again, so long as she lived, would she offer Jill one word of advice. I calmed the old dear down so well as I might, and didn't doubt 'twould be all right in a day or so; but very next morning a curious thing happened. Our house door was open and the garden gate was unlatched, and mother was sitting as usual at her window behind they red geraniums she grows so well. Jill happened to be down the street, I believe, but mother says she didn't know that. However, what should come in our garden but one of Joel Toop's pigs? He allows 'em to roam about in the village, though I don't think he ought to do it. Anyway, mother seed the pig come in and did nought. Then, if you please, the beastly animal walks into the kitchen! And my mother seed him go in, and still did nought. Now I do say that was carrying caution too far—what do you think?"

"I suppose she expected to see your wife drive it out every moment."

"No doubt she may have done. But still the time passed and that pig was in the kitchen for more'n ten minutes before Jill comed back. Then mother, seeing my wife, went to her door —they hadn't made it up, you see—and just said, rather stiff like, 'There's one of Mr. Toop's pigs in your kitchen—been there this longful time'! And Jill lost her temper and used some crooked words there and then; and when I

comed back in the evening she used a good few more."

Samuel sighed and drank another half-pint of cider.

"I hope 'tis all made up and forgotten now," said Ruth.

"Not at all," he answered. "I went over to mother when I'd heard about it, and I said, as gentle as a lamb, that I thought 'twas carrying her great caution and love of minding her own business too far. I praised her for it, mind you; but all the same I was firm—as firm as a man can be with such a mother. I give her Jill's description of the kitchen when she comed in, and I ventured to hint, in the kindest words, that I thought it might have been better if dear mother had up and gived the alarm, if no more. However, I'm sorry to say that she didn't agree with me, and blamed me harshly and fell into tears. To think that I should ever have brought tears to my mother's eyes! She said that I was against her, and that she always knowed it would come to that with such a jealous creature as Jill; and a good many other painful things, quite without truth in 'em, I'm sure. She forgived me in the long run, but not much before midnight; and when I went home, dog-tired, Jill had gone to bed, and I woke her accidental dropping off my boots. In fact, life has its drawbacks."

Ruth Rendle expressed sympathy, and there entered Moleskin, cheerful and thirsty. He shook hands with Ruth according to his custom, ordered his drink, and saluted Samuel.

"Don't often see you in here in work hours," he exclaimed, and Mr. Bolt admitted that it was so.

"As a matter of fact, I'm taking a day off," he said. "The steam-roller's broken down through no fault of mine, and till they've mended it there's really not much for me to do. Sometimes, in reckless moments, I almost feel as if I should like a change of work. About tired of road-mending with a steam-roller after fifteen years of it."

"'Tis the dullness of doing the same thing over and over again," declared Moleskin. "I've just throwed up my own job at Sampford Spiney for the very same reason. No backsliding, thank the Lord; I find myself steady as a rock in righteousness, and the pleasantest part of my week is when me and my darter stand in the House of Prayer. But I couldn't shift muck for ever, and since Farmer Ash didn't seem to have nothing else for me to do, I just up and left him. But something will come to hand soon without a doubt. Have a drop along with me, Samuel."

"If I must, I must," answered Mr. Bolt. "All the same, I've had enough cider for the present."

"Give him beer," directed Moleskin. "Beer's a very good top for cider. Never seed such poor promise of apples as there is this year, all through the country. Orchards full of little old scrubby stuff not worth gathering."

"'Tis a thunder planet reigning," repeated Samuel. "Everything be going wrong of late—and especially with me, for some reason I don't know."

"You don't drink enough," answered Moleskin. "A great mistake in you. Look at me. I find I don't take a thimbleful less than in the

old days. The only difference is that I pay money down."

"You haven't for some time though, Mr. Cawker," ventured Ruth. "If you'd like to see the score . . ."

"No occasion, no occasion, my dear. I'm quite willing to take your honest word for it. Have no fear. I shall get some new work in a day or two. And meantime, if the Almighty looks after the sparrows, so much the more is it parson's duty to look after me. We're all fellow-men, and it is the call of the clever and rich to help the humble and meek; and 'tis the business of the poor to pray for the welfare of them in authority—from the Queen downwards, which I do. In my later wisdom, I see very clearly that we can't do much for the upper classes except pray for 'em so long as they last."

"And for women labouring with child," said Samuel; "don't forget that, Mr. Cawker. I'm sure last litany Sunday when we comed to it, I felt as if every eye was on me."

Moleskin laughed tolerantly.

"Poor soul! Give him another half-pint, Ruth."

"Not another drop," murmured Samuel; but Moleskin insisted.

"You can carry it; you want uplifting. You're more of a man than you think yourself, I dare say."

"I may be; but I'm easily daunted," confessed the other. "Some days I feel my foot goes down as firm as I could wish. But other times 'tis borne in upon me that I haven't got more sense than, please God, I should have."

"Be hopeful, be hopeful. It takes all sorts to

build a world; and when the battle's over, you'll make so good a meal for worms as the best among us," declared Moleskin.

"I may, or I may not; though I know you speak it kindly; and now the beer's in my head! Yes, 'tis there: I feel it mounting! I wish I hadn't took that last drop."

"You'll soon master it," answered Moleskin. "As to beer, when a man's took a good tankard or two of cider first, beer goes down on top, you might say, like . . ."

The simile was lost, for somebody rode to the door at a gallop, pulled up, dismounted, and hastened into the bar.

It was Northmore, and he addressed Bolt.

"What are you doing here—boozing?" he asked. "I was passing your house a bit ago, and your mother screamed out to me to seek help. Your wife's ill, and I've ridden for the doctor. You'd better go, I should think—else people will say you're rather a callous brute to be here soaking at such a time."

Samuel stared, staggered, then broke into a strange excitable cackle, like a hen that has laid an egg.

"There—there—well might I say a thunder planet was over us! I laugh, but God forgive me for it. To be a sober man from my youth, and then—this minute—my child comes into the world to find its father can't stand straight!"

"Take my arm," said Moleskin. "I'll lead you up the hill. Put your head under the pump when you get back, and you'll soon be ripe for twins, or any other black news. Pull your face steady, there's a good soul. It ban't no use crying, and 'tis a thought too soon to laugh. Come

along at once, and just put all your mind into trying to look as if you wasn't drunk."

As he went out, Moleskin turned and winked at Northmore.

"Be charitable, farmer," he said. "None of us are faultless—not even this poor reed as can be shaken with a pint!"

CHAPTER XX

THE DEVOUT LOVER

THE DAY was Sunday, and drowsy peace held Merivale after the hour of dinner. A few sleepy dogs blinked at the oppressive heat; a few fowls pecked here and there or scratched pits from the dust and sat in them. There was a drone of a harmonium from one cottage, the squeak of a flute from another, but no visible sign of life. Thunder clouds hung heavy over the central Moor; Walla, shrunk to her summer tenuity, threaded the vale, and not until the eye reached the village bridge did there appear any human being. Here, however, a few men were congregated. They wore their Sunday black and smoked their pipes. Nobody said much, but their eyes turned up the valley into the darkness of the gathering storm. As yet its approach was not perceptible. It hung in a curtain of gloom low to the north, and the Moor, as far as Great Mis Tor and beyond it, basked in sunshine and shimmered with heat.

Presently a woman left the Jolly Huntsmen and approached Merivale bridge.

All the men knew her and all gave her 'good afternoon.' One added a caution.

"Keep your eye lifting out-along, Miss Rendle,"

said Rupert Johnson of Vixen Tor Farm; "there's a storm brewing. Us may miss it; but I reckon 'tis coming."

Ruth thanked the man and went her way to Princetown. She taught in the Sunday school there, and the little event was now grown to be the happiest in her week. As yet she remained with her kinsmen. Indeed, they refused to let her depart, and finally she had promised to stop another six months with them. Nevertheless she desired to go, for life thus lived brought daily anxieties and daily heart-shaking hidden from all. Northmore's long unhappy face haunted her, and she could not see Ives Pomeroy without suffering the sickness of her own secret love for him. She felt that life was making her old before her time. No day passed without one or both of the two great disquieting forces intruding upon her, for Matthew Northmore usually called on his way to or from his home, and Ives often came also to hear his own voice and spend an hour before closing time at the inn.

Yet Ruth stopped, and Avisa Pomeroy privately rejoiced. It was Mrs. Pomeroy's earnest hope and secret prayer that this woman might presently waken love in her son. She knew that the roaming and inflammable nature of Ives would take long in settling down; she understood that having failed in his first romance, he might remain a bachelor until advanced in manhood; but there was that in him of late that filled her with hope. She began to see a little more of herself in him. She feared that a too sanguine soul deceived her, and put cautious questions to her mother-in-law, to Lizzie, to Arthur Brown, and to others. Some made the answers that she wished to hear, and

some did not. Her patience was ceaseless; her tact might have appeared extraordinary to any observer who knew not that tact springs from love and sympathy rather than education, and that often the most intelligent lack it. Avisa handled Ives with exquisite delicacy bred from her own great heart. Sometimes the wonder of his mother was dimly glimpsed by him, and no project of his many projects rose but he submitted it to her. Often she supported, often she restrained; often he proceeded against her advice; and when on one occasion he did so successfully, she hastened to point out that he was right and that she had been mistaken. The admission woke a fierce, chivalrous love in him. His nature was such that any concession from another made him grateful rather than proud.

The oak coppice was not cut in young Pomeroy's twenty-fifth year, because Mr. Codd, who admittedly understood oak-rinding and everything to do with it better than any man on Walla side, strongly advised postponement.

"'Tis all against my own interests," he said sourly. "I'm very anxious to drop work and take my pension—which I suppose I may presume to mention after nearly a half-century of toil —but I shan't go till the coppice comes down, and I shan't advise you to throw it till another year's gone over it."

Mrs. Pomeroy obeyed, and Ives, who enjoyed all details of forestry, gave his services to other men with young oaks to fell.

Now Ruth went on her way to Princetown and there came a horseman in the opposite direction. It was Northmore, and, glad of the loneliness about their meeting place, he stopped, alighted,

and greeted her in his usual yearning fashion. She took her hand from his and blamed him.

"You wasn't at church this morning."

"No; I've had something pulling the other way lately. But I'll be there to-night."

"I'm stopping at Princetown till after supper," she said, and he scented a hope.

"May I bring my trap and drive you home? Please let me do that. It's a little thing enough."

He remembered a past occasion when she had let him drive her into Tavistock and when, halfway along the road, an insane desire had burned in him to set his horse galloping across the Moor that their necks might be broken together.

Ruth refused him now.

"'Tis kind to think of it; but I'd much rather walk."

"May I come to see you home, if the weather turns nasty? So like as not that storm dogging the hills will burst at nightfall."

She sighed.

"If you only knew how unkind it was . . . If you only knew how your eyes make my heart ache. Why can't you go and look round and find a woman ten thousand times better worth than I am?"

"Find her—where?"

"Anywhere—everywhere. I'm a poor straw driven by any wind—a nervous, frightened creature—a foolish thing. I shall never make no man happy. I don't know how to be happy myself, for that matter."

"I'd show you how to be if you'd let me. A man is generally strong enough to do one thing, if he pours his whole life and soul and brain into it. And that's what I'd do, and the thing would

be to make you happy if you'd let me. By God, I'd fight the whole world, and roam the whole world, to find happiness for you!"

"A poor task for a strong man. If I'm such a feeble thing that I can't make my own happiness . . ."

"You're a woman," he answered, "and no woman can have real happiness without a man be part of it. And same with us. The man that's happy without a female ban't a man—only the puppet of a man. I know what I'm saying. It came late, but it came like raging fire. I rose to my full manhood very slow; but I'd soon make up for lost time if I had the chance."

"The world's full of women."

"Full of one woman for me, and always will be, and only will be, if I live to a century."

She did not answer, and he asked his former question.

"May I come up if the weather turns bad? You can't have the heart to deny me that."

"What's the sense of getting a wet jacket for nought?"

"'Tisn't for nought. 'Tis for the blessed pleasure of holding a shelter above you."

"If — if . . ." she stammered. Then her mind overran itself; she forgot what she was going to say and stopped.

He took up the word and his voice hardened.

"If 'twas somebody else—perhaps. 'If—if—if'—you say, and stop, and think I don't know what's in your heart."

"I wasn't meaning anything—only some foolish everyday speech I meant to make."

"No, you didn't. The thought was so strong that it jumped to your lips and would have leapt

out in another moment if you hadn't shut your teeth on it. I know—I know. What don't I know where you're concerned? Everything I know—his name, too, for that matter."

He had not sunk to this until the present. But he believed that Ruth in her broken sentence had thought "If it was Ives Pomeroy." That was Northmore's genuine opinion; and it made him angry.

She resented it, turned from him with a hard look, and went her way swiftly; then, still walking beside his horse, he made haste to overtake her.

"Forgive me. I'm cruel sorry that I was such a jealous fool. I couldn't help it. I can't help knowing. I . . ."

She turned and stopped again.

"There's only one thing between us," he said; "and that's a man; and his name is Pomeroy. There! 'Tis out—more shame to me; but you've made me dead to shame. I'd creep through the contempt of the whole world now if I could win you by creeping. Curse the name of the man for ever!"

His companion's eyes showed fear.

"Don't, don't speak and think this way. He's nothing to me, Mr. Northmore."

"No, because he's a daft fool, without sense or understanding. But he might be something—he might be everything. I know it. I read you like a book, because I love you. How can I help cursing him? Yet not him. I don't hate him: I only hate your love for him."

"This is cruel!" she cried. "You're mad to say such things to a maiden that never wronged you, God knows. I don't love him. I don't love anybody. What should I know of loving? You

persecute me, and 'tis very wicked of you. My life's sad enough, and if you really loved me you wouldn't make me sadder."

He did not answer immediately.

"You're right," he said. "I'm a thought mad now and again in your company. But what you say is very true. I must have another fight for it and try to get going from here."

"'Tis the great grief of my life to have made you such an unhappy man. Of course you can't go—with your farm and everything; but I can, and I will when my six months are up. I wish they'd never made me promise to stop now. I was weak."

"It was natural. I can read your heart by knowing my own. If I found it too hard to go, well might you."

"For God's sake don't say no more of that," she begged. "Ban't comely, or right, or kind—or—or true. 'Twas a cowardly thing and you know it."

"It was. But I am a coward now. You can't help it. Anyway, one of us must go, or I'll not answer for myself."

He left her and turned his horse round; then he mounted it and walked forward. But her feet dragged now and she never reached Princetown after all. Her storm-stricken mind turned against the teaching of children, and presently, as soon as Matthew had descended the hill and was out of sight, she too began to go homeward and walked very slowly towards Merivale.

She was fearful of the farmer's increased ferocity, and retracing their intercourse she perceived how he had changed within the past year. Had love for her, then, dragged him down?

Could she thus in all innocence demoralise a man by mere persistence in a negative attitude towards him? It seemed a very monstrous thing, and, for the first time, a sort of dull resentment awoke in Ruth that her attitude should thus be rendered a reproach, because this man chose to go forlorn and wretched before the world and suffer her indifference to reduce him in the eyes of the people. And that Northmore should have named Ives Pomeroy woke active passion in her. For a time she felt anger, then it waned, and she merely mourned when she reflected on the master of Stone Park. His deterioration saddened her, and it puzzled her that such things could be. What had he done that Heaven should cloud his life with this grief? She flattered herself that she very well understood Northmore, and, as he could read her heart in the light of his own, so she believed that her secret and hopeless love helped her largely to understand his. Her anger presently waned and she forgave him everything; then her mood changed once more, and she blushed under the gathering darkness of the sky to think that Matthew knew of her love and had actually discovered a thing that she kept hidden even from herself. Again passionate wrath at the circumstance awoke within her, and her transient pity for the man was quite smothered before the first thunder drops splashed against the granite beside her way.

Lightning already licked Mis Tor as Ruth reached the bridge and felt a moment's feminine thankfulness, despite sorrows of spirit, that her Sunday finery had escaped the deluge. As she entered the Jolly Huntsmen a thunder peal seemed to shake the earth. Glorious, ragged

rifts of lightning rent the sky with fire, streamed from tor to tor, leapt across the rivers, and dropped a brand where the Lone Stones struck up blue and wan in the heart of the storm. Walla already began to wake, to rise, and murmur with great rain messages from the midmost Moor. Anon her volume came down and her valleys echoed with huge riot.

Many watched the storm, and during the height of its passage children wept, and frightened females hid their faces; but two women there were engaged upon a theme so interesting that neither found mental leisure to fear, even had fear belonged to them. One spoke; the other listened. The rattle and roar of the sky merely silenced Rachel Bolt for a moment; and as soon as it ceased, her thin and ancient pipe, ludicrous in contrast with the organ music from aloft, proceeded again and poured its message upon Avisa Pomeroy's ear.

"If anybody—if angels from heaven—had told me that Samuel would ever say a short word to me, I'd have up and answered they was liars," declared the older woman.

"And you would have been right for certain."

"But it's come—the blow's fallen. Look at my eyes—red—red. Burning tears poured out of 'em last night, and life poured away with the drops. I don't care when I die now. Not only short he was, but sharp, Avisa—sharp with me!"

"I'll wager he meant nothing."

"Every word I can call home—every word cut like a knife into my heart. 'You're wrong, mother—wrong,' he said. 'You're wrong. Jill knows perfectly well how to manage the baby!' That's what he said, Avisa—to my face, after I'd

told him, day in, day out, since the little girl came, that his wife's killing it."

"A man can't always agree with his mother's opinion."

"I don't ask that; but in matters of a baby, what right has he to have any opinion? But there, words are no use. He's taken her part. 'Tis time, and more than time, I was underground. I might have known it: the Bible prophesies it. I must wait and watch and see my grandchild done to death by that cruel viper."

"'Tis a very weakly little one," admitted Mrs. Pomeroy. "You mustn't be very hopeful, I'm afraid. We'll trust to better luck next time."

"It could be reared, if there was anybody to rear it. But I've got to sit here and see it die by inches. That wretch hates it, Avisa! No call to shake your head. Do I know best or you? She hates it, like the stupid creature she is, because it's a red un. And whose fault was that? Sammy ban't red, anyhow. He's a flaxen man without a red hair on his body. She's dormouse colour; and what more natural than she should have a ginger-haired babe? If that child dies, 'twill be murder," declared Rachel bitterly. "And old as I am, I'll tear her face for her afore the people, if it happens!"

Avisa strove long to comfort her friend, but Mrs. Bolt would not be comforted.

CHAPTER XXI

LIZZIE WEDDED

MR. ARTHUR BROWN prided himself upon a well-regulated mind. When, therefore, his wedding day arrived, it found him calm and perfectly prepared. His hand did not shake as he shaved himself, and he parted his hair down the middle with neither more nor less care than usual. A fortnight of the honeymoon would be spent at Ilfracombe and a fortnight in London. Lodgings were already engaged and expenses calculated to the last halfpenny. One five-pound note was allowed for possible luxuries. Arthur did not approve of the theatre, but hoped to take his wife to a concert or two. Lizzie had never been to London, and the prospect was a delight to her.

She looked a dainty little thing in her white muslin; but she, too, was very staid and showed no emotion under the ordeal. Only her grandmother wept in the vestry, and Avisa's eyes shone to see her maiden given into the keeping of a man.

All who cared for the Pomeroys contrived to be present, because this was held an important wedding. Mr. Brown had very few relations or intimates, but a schoolmaster or two attended the ceremony, and his friend, Harold Wilkinson, a

young jeweller from London, acted as best man. The bridegroom did not entirely approve of many among the wedding guests, though he was gracious both before and after the ceremony.

It remained for Ives to cast a cloud upon the day, and he chose a moment peculiarly inappropriate to do so. Some had driven and some had walked back from the wedding, and he preferred to return home afoot. With him came Joel Toop and Emmanuel Codd.

"Be sure not to mention it," said the publican, "but 'twill be out soon, only I want the wedded pair to get off without hearing the news. They'll toll the bell this evening. Such is life."

"Who's dead now?" asked Ives.

"A very poor, small morsel of flesh, and a great deliverance for all concerned. 'Tis Samuel Bolt's baby, in fact. They found her dead in the cradle this morning."

"That's a damned good thing," declared Ives. "Anyway, Jill will think so."

"And I dare say she knows more about it than she'll tell the coroner," growled Codd.

Ives looked at him dangerously, but the old man missed his glance.

"There'll be a little feeling without a doubt," added Joel. "My brother was up so soon as he heard about it, to comfort all parties and take the measurements himself. And I'm sorry to say that there was high words going. In fact, old Rachel have made herself mighty ill, and the doctor, when he comed, was busier with her than with the dead child. Sammy sat in a corner crying his eyes out, and Jill was calm as a statue."

"I hope 'twill be the beginning of a bit of peace for her," said Ives. "That old woman,

and her husband and his flute pretty well worry the flesh off her bones."

"She don't get more than she deserves," answered Codd; "and I hope they'll have the rights of this business."

"Really, you ought to be careful, Codd," replied Joel. "You come dangerously near to libel in the things you let yourself say. Some day you'll fall within reach of the law, and that means money, I can tell you."

"More likely a horsewhip," said Pomeroy. "Old blackguard! The law's too slow to tackle him. He wants a lathering to sting charity into his dirty heart—makes a decent man sick to hear him snarling. If he'd died when he was a beast of a baby, the world would have been that much a pleasanter place."

"Pretty talk—on your sister's wedding-day, too!"

"Shut your mouth," cried the other. "Keep your nasty thoughts inside; don't spill 'em to make your betters sick."

It was in this frame of mind that Ives took his place at the wedding board, and every circumstance of the banquet increased his exasperation. The bridegroom's frigid propriety irritated Ives to madness. Arthur smiled on a calculated scale of geniality in proportion to the importance of the guest. He made several pleasant remarks at the breakfast. He helped Lizzie to cut the cake. He called everybody 'neighbour' except his best man; but the jeweller, though a lifelong friend, he addressed as 'Mr. Wilkinson.' Arthur Brown, in fact, suggested a good young man unbending among his inferiors. This patronage even extended a little to Lizzie herself. He

seemed to be at somebody else's wedding. He suggested one who was here as a compliment to inferior folk. The homelier guests felt a little frightened of him.

Ives, with a cloud on his face, ate his meal silently and wished the matter ended. Presently, however, he caught his mother's eye, understood her expression, and made an effort to be more urbane. Avisa knew that Jill Bolt's baby was dead, but she hoped that bride and bridegroom might depart in ignorance of the fact. However, that was not to be. Peter Toop was overheard by Arthur.

"Ah—taken from the evil to come doubtless," he said. "In my judgment a man of the build of Samuel Bolt should not have been permitted to have any hand in the next generation. I have devoted a good deal of thought to the subject and . . ."

A cork shot dangerously close to the schoolmaster's ear and silenced him. Ives was opening three bottles of champagne, and whether he had intentionally or accidentally directed the first toward Mr. Brown, he alone knew. Everybody laughed; the bridegroom smiled, and dried a few drops of wine that had touched his face. Lizzie's glass was filled, but her husband took none. He shook his head leniently at young Pomeroy, who carried round the champagne.

"Must be true to my principles—even to-day," he said; and Ives turned to his mother and filled her glass.

Meantime the schoolmaster talked to a farmer's wife who sat on his left.

"I haven't signed anything, you know—too liberal-minded for that, I hope. But as I believe

in teetotalism after having considered the question in all its bearings, so I am consistent and practise it myself. I find that consistency seems a great difficulty to many people. To me it has always been quite easy."

His listener looked at him round-eyed and with an open mouth, but she made no answer.

The champagne allowed a full glass to every member of the company and left a drain for Ives himself. Having poured all out, he returned to his seat, fingered the stem of his glass, and waited for the health of the bride and bridegroom to be proposed.

To Mr. Peter Toop fell the solitary toast of the day, and his speech was long and never reached its peroration, for Ives created an extremely painful diversion, and the wine that should have been drunk to a sister's happiness was differently applied. For some time the company listened to Peter, then people began to whisper among themselves. Mr. Codd addressed Johnson. Then it was that Ives overheard a sentiment and instantly exploded.

Emmanuel Codd, ghoul-like, appeared incapable of dragging himself away from the dead baby.

"Bah! The likes of her don't care a rush for law and order. Perhaps I know and perhaps I don't know who was the father, but it wasn't that slack-twisted toad her husband, mark me!"

This assertion was not designed for any other than his fellow-worker, but, unluckily for Mr. Codd, young Pomeroy heard every syllable, rose, roared, sought a missile and found his wineglass.

"You vile old wretch!" he cried. "Why haven't the women wrung your skinny neck afore

to-day? Take that and get you gone, you loathsome beast!"

He flung his wine into Mr. Codd's face and then leapt from the table. Consternation prevailed. Mrs. Pomeroy rose; Arthur Brown shrugged his shoulders.

"Even to-day!" he murmured reproachfully to Lizzie.

Ives went out without a word; Emmanuel Codd drew forth a red handkerchief and mopped his face.

"I give notice!" he screamed out. "Mark me, all you people as have seen that infernal young monster—I give notice for this day month! I'll endure no more of it, no more of it. And how God A'mighty can suffer that man beats me."

He also left the table and disappeared.

"Get on, Peter!" said Joel Toop with admirable presence of mind.

But the undertaker had lost the thread of his discourse and made no effort to find it.

"I command all present to drink to these here dear people," he said. "Good luck and long life and prosperity to Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Brown!"

Lizzie kept her tears out of sight and soon retired to make ready for her journey; while Ives waited for his sister and went up to her room with her.

"I owe you a word, Lizzie," he said soberly, "and cruel sorry I am to have made a fuss on such a day of all days; but I couldn't help it; and if you knew what that hatch-mouthed old brute was whispering you'd forgive me. I'll tell you what he said some day, but not to-day. Anyway, God knows that I wish you all the good

and happiness and joy and luck and love that a brother can wish a sister. And here's mother. I'm telling Lizzie how 'twas, mother. So long as you and she understand, I care not a rush for t'others."

Mrs. Pomeroy, thankful for small mercies, felt glad to find Ives with his sister, and when he had left them, Lizzie explained that he had received some very dreadful provocation. The mother doubted it not. His attack on Mr. Codd and his subsequent speech with his sister both sprang from a love of what was good. So Mrs. Pomeroy believed; and when her son subsequently told her the truth concerning the head man's imaginings she blamed him no more.

After Lizzie and her husband had set out Ives disappeared, and did not return home until long after midnight, to find his mother waiting for him.

He was vexed at this and wished her in bed.

"You take no heed for your health," he said; "and the doctor ordered above all things that you was to keep an easy mind and a lazy body. And now Lizzie's gone you'll work harder than ever."

"Don't fear that. Time will show that I'm hale and hearty again, I do hope. I talked to Codd to-night, and I think he's a bit ashamed of himself, though he sticks to it that he'll go this day month."

"Then mind he does. Don't yield to him again. Drive him out. I'll not answer for myself if I catch any more of his filthy speeches."

"It won't hurt her, however."

"I saw Jill this afternoon up the valley. We met by chance, and both on the same errand: to get a little peace from our fellow-creatures. She couldn't pretend she cared much about such a

puny, crooked child, for she'm honest enough, whatever else she may be. And I comforted her, I can tell you, mother. And why for not?"

The defiance in his voice told his mother more than his words. But she did not remonstrate.

"Why for not indeed? I went up myself to see Rachel after the people had all gone home. 'Tis a very heart-breaking business, because of so much cruel misunderstanding. The only peaceful thing in the house be the li'l dead girl."

"'Twas a damned cruel thing for Jill to have to waste her time bringing trash into the world; and she's glad it's gone; and I consoled her a good deal by telling her that I was glad too."

Ives continued to discuss Jill and her trials and difficulties. She had entirely won him round to her side, and Avisa felt concerned to note his deep and close interest. She said little, but listened patiently.

When he slept, however, she lay waking. Avisa did not fear her son, but feared for him: because Jill was a fascinating woman, and soon she promised to be a desperate one. That day, made reckless by anger and grief, Rachel had permitted herself to say many things to her friend. The misery of Samuel's home apparently approached a climax, and old Mrs. Bolt openly declared that she expected Jill to run away. She added that the sooner her son's wife took this definite step the better she would be pleased.

CHAPTER XXII

OAK RINDING

THERE DAWNED a misty morning, with a gentle west wind and a grey sky that broke away to blue as the sun ascended. Towards noon the clouds dissolved, but something impalpable still hung like a glory over the deep budding woods, warmed the meadows with light, and brooded upon the wakening expanses of the Moor. This mellow veil was neither mist nor cloud, but air made visible: the pearly, transparent vesture of young Spring. It spread upon the face of the earth, added brilliance to the forest, lustre to the stone, and gentleness to the austerities of the wilderness that swept upward from the valleys to the hills.

Over against his home, on the eastern bank of Walla, Ives Pomeroy sat on a mossy boulder beside a woman. They talked earnestly; and their feet were buried in flowers. Opposite them the Vixen towered above Pomeroy's farm, where it gleamed with newly whitewashed walls. Beneath was the river and her hanging woods; while at hand stretched those oaken coppices whose time had come and who now shook forth their last splendour of golden green. Above, the waste rose toward King Tor, and the spring

gorse shone in sheaves and masses of gold from a flowery sea. The warm odour of the furze was intoxicating in its strength; and over the brightness of its flame there ascended silver birches, that trembled with infant leaves; and sprang stiff, glittering hollies, islanded in the flower light that swept the hill. But the first glory of the place and hour was a magic of wild wood hyacinths that spread their azure in one fragrant coverlet over glen and dingle. Each nodding perianth tube of all these many millions revealed twin colours, for each segment of every blossom showed a strong vein of purest turquoise, broad at the base and running to a point, imposed upon the paler violet texture of the petal. Those blended tints flowed together, made the purple of the flower masses, and closely copied the splendour of the sky above them; while another subtle marvel was the simultaneous and similar curve of unnumbered little stems that nodded under their bells and answered each kiss of the air with a pale flash of light, where they bent together at the stroke of the breeze and together sprang upward again when it passed by.

Everywhere the secret of the day was told in bird music and the flash of wings, in the uncurling of leaves and the colour of the first flowers. Life seemed to make the earth pulse under foot, to renew the youth of matter and throb into the heart of every ancient stone, even as it ran along sappy, new-born tendrils, or laughed in setting seeds and mating creatures. From the honey-coloured hazes over the forest, to the least blossom in the marsh; from the tiny earthquake, where a mole broke soil, to the cuckoo's unimpassioned monotony, the time was rife and pregnant: an

hour when youth clove to youth, burnt for youth, and learned from youth to conquer and to love.

But, though man seemed not remembered in this vernal pageant, yet he had set his own mark very sternly upon the season. Rank upon rank the regiments of the sapling oaks lay thrown; and those still standing shone all wan and naked, stripped of their bark as high as a man might tear it from them. The ghostly fallen made a dazzle of raw white under the sunshine, and the skeletons above them waited to fall. Now flung open to the sky, the coppice showed itself as a steep hillside of moss-clad boulders and countless shorn boles. A scatter of chips from the axe spread red and white among the ferns and bluebells; in each clearing rose little stacks of bark and faggots of small wood, while the poles were being gradually trimmed and cast into piles for removal. The sun shone impartially into the prosperous glades, upon their stricken neighbours, and over those tracts, shorn in a recent year, where now began the task of building up another coppice for the axes of men unborn to fell. In the theatre where those uncreated creatures would labour, time made ready.

Ives sat beside Jill Bolt. They met by appointment without secrecy; and within sight of them Rupert Johnson, Emmanuel Codd, and several others were working.

She retraced recent events, for they had not spoken together of late days.

"After Christmas the old woman 'peared to grow a bit more friendly. Samuel was ill then, you remember, and off work for nearly six weeks. She wanted him to go in the hospital, for she mistrusts me and thinks I can't look after him;

but he wouldn't go, and he's pretty right again now. A dog's life; I suppose 'twill be better when his mother dies."

She looked straight before her, and he fixed his gaze on her strange face and heavy eyes; her hair, like a pale fire; her round deep bosom. She had grown thinner of late, he thought, but she was none the worse for it. He carried an ash sapling in his hand, and, after patting the ground idly with it, stroked her shoe. She did not heed him.

"How's your husband's uncle now?" asked Ives.

"Nearly all right, I believe."

"You were married under false pretences, then."

She smiled.

"Not that—only a cruel bad bargain. My race be very unlucky: nothing ever falls out well with us. The one good thing that's happened to me since I married was making your mother my friend. She understands pretty near all I've got to suffer—nobody else does."

"I do."

"You understand all that a man can—I grant that. Oh, Ives, you don't know how I love you for being so large-minded; but there's a lot of things no man could understand, and that your mother does. A very wonderful creature. I hope to God she's growing stronger and no sign of any more trouble."

His face grew gloomy.

"As for that, she makes light of it, but I don't. She's going into Tavistock again next week—for my satisfaction, though she vows that all be very well. I see her hand go up sometimes, when she

thinks none be looking, and I feel the stab of the pain as if 'twas in my own breast."

"I'd lay down my life for that woman," said Jill; "and so would you, if I know you."

He nodded and was silent. Then his voice changed a little, and she marked an echo of the old masterful intonation when he courted her. But it shook a trifle too, as though he was not quite certain of himself.

"Look at me, Jill," he commanded; and she obeyed instantly.

Her pale eyes, under the droop of the upper lid, fixed themselves on his dark ones. She did not look horizontally into his face, but obliquely and sidelong. The glance was gentle, humble, and trusting.

"You said you loved me just now."

"Well, and I do. I'm not ashamed of truth—never was. Is it a sin? But don't think no more of it. What's done be done."

"'Tis a brave man's part to undo what's done sometimes," he said.

She laughed and put out her hand for him to hold. It was a simple gesture often performed in the past—like the unconscious action of a child. He used to love her to do it then. Now he held it and looked round. There was nobody in sight, though shouts and the cracking of wood echoed close by. He held her hand and pressed it as he used to. She drew it away.

"Whatever be I thinking of?" she said.

"Thinking of two years agone," he answered. "And so be I. You've not changed much, for all your trouble."

"I'm thinner far."

"So pretty as ever, anyway."

"You are a wonnerful chap," she said.

"Give me a kiss, then," he faltered, not looking at her. "Your good's my good. I never saw anybody that I never got tired of but you. I'd go to the world's end for you this minute, Jill."

"No more kisses, Ives."

"One—on that little mole on your cheek. Please, Jill!"

A light twinkled across the valley. A spot of white fluttered up and down in the garden, and the man marked it.

"Dinner," he said; "that's my mother waving her apern. 'Tis the signal dinner's ready. Just one, Jill. Where's the harm of that? Who's the worse? I'm panting all over for it!"

"'Tis springtime in your blood. Any other she would make you just as hungry."

"No, my God!"

"I won't let you kiss me, Ives, because I don't think 'tis a seemly thing; but I'll come and eat a bit of dinner along with your mother and you, if you like. No call for me to be home till tea-time."

He was delighted, and made up his mind to touch her face with his lips before the day was done.

"That's very good news," he said. "And mother will be pleased, I know, for she thinks a lot of your pluck. You go straight down the path and I'll follow you. I begin to work myself to-morrow. I can strip three of these poles while other chaps be stripping one."

"Of course you can."

"Stop at the river. Don't cross without me. There's a lot of water going down and the stepping-stones be half hidden."

"Very well, so I will."

She went her way and Ives turned to the men.

To see the bark being stripped from the living trees had struck an imaginative stranger as horrible: an infliction of some appalling torture upon quick sentient beings. The integument shredded away in great flakes torn by strong hands, and a sharp odour of sap infused the air. The perishing coppice exuded a death-scent, and the naked boles stood livid and shining as the skin was ripped in dull silver flakes from every limb.

Emmanuel Codd piled the bark. For the third time he now saw Vixen Tor Farm coppices cut down; but he could not live to witness the operation repeated; and if this reflection made him feel patriarchal, it also rendered him morose. He had quite determined to give warning and retire during the following autumn.

Through the tree stems, himself unseen, Mr. Codd had watched his master touch the hand of Jill. Now Ives approached him, and the old man, labouring along under an armful of oak bark, stopped and waited for young Pomeroy to speak. Emmanuel, with his brown face and thin mouth, with his load and the strong smell of the bark exuding from his person, stood there a very incarnation of the astringent, tannic, tonic principle.

Ives dimly recognised this.

"They ought to cart you away with the other stuff," he said, laughing shortly. "You'd tan hides as well as oak can."

"Truth generally tastes bitter in a bad world," answered Codd. "Not that truth will ever tan you into anything useful."

"'Tis just for that I like you to stop here,"

answered Pomeroy. "There's no friendship takes the trouble that a red-hot hate does."

"I'll take this trouble, anyhow, hate or no hate," answered the old man. "For your mother's sake I'll always scorn anything you may do or say that's wrong. You mind this: don't you be loafing about stray corners with your neighbour's wife! Cuss till you're black in the face; that's good advice anyway, and there's no hate behind it."

He threw his load down, then began to pile the bark upon a grey and growing stack.

Ives did not curse, but laughed.

"I might have known you was squinting at us! You scent evil, like a carrion crow scents a dead pony. Don't you fear, my old blid. I shan't do nothing to shock your nasty mind."

He was none the less glad that Mrs. Bolt had refused his petition.

"Another thing," said Emmanuel. "'Tis all one to you, no doubt, whether a man works or idles; but Cawker, as be down on the south edge of the copse-wood, might just as well go home for all the good he's doing. As my duty was, I went across this morning and surprised him sitting by the river smoking his pipe and watching a wood-dove's nest over his head. I only tell you this because I believe he's getting four shillings a day for his job. Nothing to me, of course. All the same, since he took to sneaking up parson's sleeve that man's grown to be the idlest dog on Dartmoor."

"I'm going back that way," answered Ives; then he descended the hill.

The edge of the wood, where Moleskin was supposed to be earning honest money, extended but little out of the farmer's road as he passed

to the river. He made the necessary detour, therefore, and, on sighting Mr. Cawker, crept forward carefully and stalked him.

But the converted poacher knew right well what it was to be stalked, and he saw Ives coming long before the latter saw him. Nevertheless Moleskin, who in truth was not working, made no effort to do so. He lolled on a cushion of wild thyme and his eyes peered into the valley beneath. Blue smoke puffed from his pipe, and his dinner in a little frail stood beside him. He appeared the picture of content and peace.

"Morning, Ives. I heard 'e coming! You see, I know who 'tis without looking round," said the idler, when Ives had reached to within twenty yards of him. Then Moleskin rose and beamed and stretched his arms.

"A gladsome day," he said. "'Tis good to be alive and know you'm a righteous creature doing man's appointed work on such a day."

"Drop that rot," said Pomeroy. "Why ban't you working?"

Mr. Cawker winked slowly.

"For that matter, you might have found me hard at it if I'd lowered myself to deceive you, because I marked you on the way long before you saw me. I knowed 'twas you, but I scorned to pretend anything. 'Tis a day to glory at and feast upon and drink in, like a drop of spirits. The whole world's in love this morning. And love be love, Pomeroy, a thing a mighty lot higher than work."

"Love be love, as you say; and four shillings be four shillings," answered Ives. Then he took a seat and filled a pipe, with his thoughts running upon the woman by the river.

"Then, for once, let me have four bob for love," said Moleskin. "Four bob is four bob, and nobody can deny it," he continued. "Yet four bob a day to a man of my parts be very small money. Not that I grumble, because righteousness is its own reward, as I tell my wife when she says it must end in the workhouse afore next winter. 'Let it,' I answer. 'There was a time when you longed to go there, and said openly to me that the infirmary would be the highest joy you could hope for this side of New Jerusalem. But now, when 'tis very like indeed that we'll all have to go there, through my great and blessed reformation—now, be blessed if you don't begin to fall shy of the idea and clamour for more money!' But why need I say these things to you? You know what the women be. If they was reasonable and common-sensible, half the pleasure of 'em would be gone. 'Tis the surprises in 'em and the unexpectedness of their minds draws me—a wonnerful gamble they be, never so near as when farthest off, and never so far off as when in your arms. But—there, you've got the delight of finding out about 'em still. I'd give my knowledge for your ignorance if I could begin all over again—bless their cunning hearts!"

"You're too much for me," said Ives. He felt in his pocket and found half-a-crown. "Give this to Mrs. Cawker with my compliments, and mind you do!"

Moleskin was hurt.

"Once you might have said that; but I take it very unkind, since I turned over a new leaf."

"Get on with your work and don't waste no more of your time or mine," said Ives.

"Come down to the river, then—for luck," answered Mr. Cawker. "I've got a bottle dropped in there—to keep cool against the dinner hour. Hard work and rough work, this rinding the oaks. Do you mind the old saying about it: 'Go into oak-ripping dressed and you'll come out ragged; go into it ragged and you'll come out naked'? 'Tis a great strain on my humble clothes, as you see. Anyway, you must have a drop from my bottle."

"I start to-morrow," answered Ives. "Then I'll show some of you what rinding means."

They reached the river, and Moleskin fished up a big white glass bottle full of gin and water. Pomeroy, to oblige him, drank a little. Then they parted, and soon the farmer stood again by Jill Bolt, where she waited at the crossing. Thought had sped somewhat swiftly with her during his absence, and it was she who seemed in an oncoming mood now.

"I was afraid you'd forgot me," she said.

"Not likely! I don't forget. There's more water here than I thought."

She laughed.

"Looks as if you'll have to wade a shallow and carry me across."

He fired at the idea.

"I will!"

"Of course not—I was only laughing. There's no need really."

"I'm going to do it—and—and . . ."

He sat down and began to take off his boots. He was in such a hurry that he fumbled a knot. The lace was leather, but in his amorous impatience he exerted sudden strength and broke it.

"'Tis all nonsense. I can take off my shoes

and stockings as well as you, for that matter," she said.

But he did not reply. In a moment more his boots were round his neck and his socks in his pocket. Then he turned his trousers to the knees, flung his stick over the river, and opened his arms.

"Come on," he said. "No good saying 'no.' I be going to carry you over willy-nilly now."

She let him have his will, and his arms picked her up and held her close.

"You be lighter than you was."

"Yes, I am; and maybe you're stronger."

He waded out, and his feet felt the sparkling water, and his face the woman's hair. In mid-stream he stopped and looked at her, and hugged her.

"Go on, go on," she cried. "This ban't fair."

"All's fair in . . ."

He kissed her.

"Kiss me back," he said, "or I'll drop you in the river!"

He felt her arms tighten round his neck and she kissed him fiercely thrice for his once.

"Glory, glory!" he shouted, and his noise frightened a kingfisher that sat twenty yards distant on a dead branch above a pool. There it had perched, like an opal on a skeleton's finger; but now, alarmed, it twinkled down stream and vanished.

For a long time not another word passed between Jill and Ives. He brought her across, then put on his shoes and socks, then picked up his stick. Presently he spoke again.

"This is the most splendid thing that has happened to me for years," he said.

"You was always too strong for me, and always will be. I won't trust you no more, Ives."

He did not speak, and half-way up the hill she burst out impatiently:

"To live all one's life in such a home as mine! I wish to God I was dead and out of it."

Still he did not reply. He was thinking swiftly of all that she meant to him. Old fires began to waken; a thousand old memories arose through the channels of the senses since he had held her so close again and pressed his face against her.

"I'm going to think about it," he said presently. "There's a remedy for most things where two people be of one mind. Leave it till us meet again."

"I'm nothing to fret your mind or waste your thoughts about. I'm only an unhappy sort of woman that's drawn a blank in the world, like plenty of my betters."

They appeared at the farm, and Ives explained that Jill had come to eat with them. He went away for a time and left the women together.

"I hope you get stronger," said Jill. "Mrs. Bolt said something about you to Samuel and feared you wasn't so well."

Avisa shook her head.

"Just ups and downs—same as we all have—men or women," answered Avisa. "Don't say nothing before the boy. It makes him so terrible vexed when a word's spoken. Besides, you must know I'm to have a useful help here come autumn. Then Ruth Rendle is going to stop for a few months along with us."

"They'll miss her cruel."

"I'm afraid they will; but for some reasons

I'm thinking she'll be happier along with me—just through a winter till I'm spry again."

At dinner the talk ran on Lizzie Brown and her husband. They still dwelt at Sampford Spiney; but Arthur had at last achieved promotion and would go to more important work in East Devon after Christmas.

"And a good riddance," said Ives. "The starch in that man would stiffen all the collars in England."

"'Tis only his manner. You ought to pity poor Arthur, not blame him," said Avisa. "Think what 'tis to go through the world without ever laughing!"

"Without feeling, more like," answered her son. "No more power of feeling than the stone you bark your shin on. For that matter the likes of him be stones. I'm always mad after I've been along with that man for five minutes."

"Lizzie's happy—that's the main thing," said Jill. "So long as she understands his nature and he don't hurt her . . ."

"He don't hurt her, because she haven't got the power of being hurt," answered Ives. "A little unfinished thing like dear Lizzie—made to be cuddled and fussed over—eh, mother?"

"No, Ives. Lizzie wasn't that sort. She never wanted cuddling—even from me when she was a young one. She's happier without it. He loves her very well, and she's perfectly satisfied with what she gets."

That night Ives talked along with his mother, bewailed the wrongs of Jill, and tried to win some expression of opinion from Avisa. She was cautious and sympathetic. She guessed what had set his blood on fire, and felt no anger at

the fact. Her sorrow was that this woman had strength still to waken his hunger, and that it was not another who had done so. She felt uneasy concerning the future; and for the present she felt powerless. The trend of her son's existence was towards betterment, and there she left the matter. His mind steadily enlarged; his views were tinctured by more knowledge and understanding. For the rest he continued his unequal and uncertain way. Upon one glad occasion, treasured in the mother's heart, young Pomeroy had openly admitted that there was more in Ruth Rendle than at one time he had imagined. She accepted the concession with immense secret satisfaction, but was careful to reveal none of her hidden delight. As for the plan that Ruth should come to Vixen Tor presently, Ives made no objection at all. Since Lizzie had left, too much work fell on Avisa, and she would not engage a servant. Therefore her son was glad when Ruth promised to come. He did not guess the girl's secret trepidation or the struggle that went to this decision. Indeed, Mrs. Pomeroy herself knew nothing of it. But she was very glad that Ruth should stay with them a while, and she felt that, so far as her son was concerned, the inevitable intimacy that must arise from dwelling together would settle the problem in her mind.

CHAPTER XXIII

A RELAPSE

NOW DID the mother's natural fire abate and sickness surely lessen her native energy. She hid all that was possible, and her strength waned so slowly that no eye marked the gradual decline of it. Indeed, the folk believed her better.

There came certain summer days when circumstances all combined to make Avisa happy, and good followed upon good. Another had feared such prosperous tidings and predicted some rough reverse before that week was done; but she felt no uneasiness and, looking forward, only prayed that her life's hope might come within sight of fulfilment before the end. Her secret desires, indeed, were largely narrowed to Ives at this season, and he was seldom out of her mind. Of late, while her health had been again the first anxiety at Vixen Tor, Ives behaved as a very pattern man and son. He thought for her and largely lived for her. Nothing that could cause her anxiety came upon his lips; himself and his affairs he kept out of sight and discussed but shortly, even when she pressed him to do so.

She hoped, and tried hard to believe, that he

had ceased to think of Jill Bolt, and she was able to tell him that Samuel's wife appeared much happier.

Then came Peter Toop to see Mrs. Pomeroy, and she found that the publican echoed her own opinions.

"A very great improvement, and we all mark it," he declared. "Even Northmore, as can't be called a friend of Ives, has allowed of late in company that your son seems inclined to grow up to man's estate at last. He'll catch up his years very soon and be as good and steadfast a character as his father before him."

"You couldn't say nothing sweeter than that," she answered. "This is a red-letter day for me to hear you tell such things. I do think you've hit the truth touching Ives."

Peter expressed pleasure, then proceeded to the matter that had brought him.

"I be come chiefly about Ruth. You'll guess 'tis a very cruel loss to us, and for my part I can't see at all how we'll do without her. You know Matthew Northmore?"

"Very well, poor chap."

"A mistaken and a desperate man. He's ruined his life largely on her account."

"She will never take him. She cannot."

"Of course she won't. Why should she? You talk to him, Avisa Pomeroy. I can't myself, and Joel won't, because he says since Ruth is so short-sighted as to leave us he doesn't feel no more interest in her. But I do, and I wish very much for her welfare. So, as a beginning, I beg you'll speak in your usual clear-sighted and reasonable way to Northmore and tell him to give over."

"You ask a harder thing than you know," she answered. "I'm interested in Ruth too—and very, very interested in her future. I look through a mother's eyes, yet I wouldn't do it if it was unfair to her. But 'tis this way. I honestly believe, and more and more every day of my son's life, that he and she would make a most beautiful, happy couple and be a very good blend. I'm telling you secrets, Peter, but I know you'll keep them."

"Well, Ives be on the upward path, I believe."

"And the wiser he gets, the more he'll see in Ruth."

"I wonder what she thinks of him? But even you don't know that, I suppose. And why should that stop you talking to Matthew Northmore?"

"Because I'm partial. I try not to be, but I must be. Still, perhaps there's no unfairness in my trying to get the poor fellow to see how 'tis."

"Certainly not; and I hope you will. Remember, Ruth's that fond of you that if you held up your finger she'd jump in the river for you."

"And I'm fond of her—dearly fond. 'Tis more than good of you to let her come to me just while I've so little nature in me; but I hope you'll see her as often as you like, and when I get a bit stronger presently, then maybe she'll come back again to you—if nothing happens."

Peter laughed.

"Something will happen, however—if you've got your native wits in your head still."

"Don't think I shall do anything. I know 'em both too well . . ."

He left her soon afterwards, and, albeit a man not very swift in reading of human nature, yet

marked the change in his friend's outlook upon the world, and fancied that he saw a certain unsteadiness of mental view foreign to Avisa in health. He was partly right and partly wrong. A change indeed had come, and Avisa secretly permitted herself a somewhat more sanguine attitude than of old; but the thoughts that she had expressed to Peter sprang from the explicit improvement of Ives, not from the knowledge of her own increasing weakness. Her sight was not dimmed.

She sat alone in the kitchen when Peter departed, and the next guest was Mary Cawker. Rupert Johnson brought her in and explained that she had come to see the mistress.

At Avisa's wish the man stopped, because she knew something about his secret mind that none else knew.

Mary declared the happiness of her family, and of herself, at a rumour concerning Mrs. Pomeroy's bettered health.

"Mother, as be a bed-lier and understands illness as only such dead-alive creatures can, was very wishful to tell you that she felt thankful," said Mary. "And father too."

"A wonderful reform, and I hope he'll never look back," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," answered Moleskin's daughter. "Yet, now and again, I have my doubts how 'twill end. To be plain with you, he's a terrible lazy old man since he found the Lord."

"Ives gave your father a lot of work in spring."

"And don't we know it? And wasn't we thankful? There's work waiting for father now. But he haven't a mind to it. He's off to church

like a lark twice every Sunday, and he takes the bread and wine with the best; but work . . ."

She broke off and sighed. Then she continued :

"He's like they hawks and owls and weasels. Life for him means death for something else. He can't live and let live. He can't help it—built so. You couldn't tell a weasel to stand to work and get his living honest, any more than you could ax one of them dagger-billed birds to give up hunting and live on berries. 'Tis the same with father—his nature droops under the use of common tools, like spade or bill-hook."

"I'll talk to Ives," promised Avisa. "Seemingly 'tis a choice with your parent between doing wrong and doing nothing."

"He'll never do nothing. Far too busy-brained a man for that," answered Moleskin's daughter. "But if you could—if anybody could see their way to seventeen and six a week, I do think all might come right."

"He's well worth it," said Mr. Johnson. "If I get it, as I do, then your father ought to be good for a sovereign at the least, if not more."

Avisa nodded, and her eyes twinkled.

"You can knock off work for a bit and see Mary up the hill, if you like, Rupert," she said.

The young man started guiltily; the hard-faced Mary showed no emotion. But Avisa had seen a dawn of joy even for Mary Cawker. She smiled as they went out together, and Rupert uttered his thanks.

"I'll bide after hours, ma'am. Have no fear as the farm will lose by it."

These things happened on a Wednesday, and during the following days Ives himself rejoiced

his mother by his solicitude. He also mystified her. It seemed that he had surprises for her, but he would not utter them until he knew her health was strong enough to stand them. She had long guessed that something was hidden, but as yet knew not what it might be.

The time to tell seemed close, for she could usually rely upon instinct in this matter, and Avisa came with placid mind to the familiar nightly interview. Ives said little by day to her or anybody. It was at those times, when the life of the farm slept, when he returned to his home after midnight, and when Avisa often came down from her room to see him eat his supper—at these times he told her things concerning his personal interests, plans, and hopes.

On Saturday night the mother and old Jane Pomeroy sat and talked of the past. It seemed that a climax had been attained of late by each member of the little family, and Jane reviewed the situation.

"I, for one, never should have expected it," she said. "Because you always let him have a freer hand than his father would. However, all's well, I do believe. He's taking closer and closer after my son."

"Yes, mother."

"They break our bodies," said the old woman, "but that's nothing. 'Tis as much for what they've made us suffer as for anything else that we love 'em. Nought's so precious as what have cost pain to come by. But when they break our hearts . . . I've heard no girl's name on his lips for a year, and that's to the good, in my judgment."

"I hope you will, however, before long."

"She'll need to be a clever creature—and a brave one."

"Lizzie's happy as a lark too. If Ives be so well suited with a partner in his turn, you and me can go happy, my dear."

Jane nodded.

"No need to talk of going, all the same," she said.

"And if he makes as good a husband as he has a son . . ." continued Avisa.

"Let's hope he'll shine better at it—for all sakes. We mothers be too easily satisfied. The wives want a lot more than we do," declared old Mrs. Pomeroy.

"We ought to be satisfied," answered Avisa. "One thing's sure: there are more good sons in the world than bad."

"So there ought to be, if religion counts for anything. But all the same, 'tis easier to be a good son than a good husband, in my opinion."

They talked by fits and starts until it was after ten o'clock. Then Jane summed up, as she rose to depart:

"And Ives have got to get in love with my favourite, Ruth. That's the next thing. Then —then I suppose I'll be a great-grandmother, and you'll be a grandmother, and us'll begin our cares and hopes and ideas all over again for the next generation. There's no steady happiness in this world if you love people."

"There's no steady happiness unless you do," said Avisa.

Jane Pomeroy went to bed, and her daughter-in-law prepared a supper for Ives.

Upon her dreams the man presently came and brought red-hot reality with him. He was

flushed and evidently excited. He asked a question swiftly, and when his mother answered in the affirmative, his secrets burst out of him in a flood.

"Be you strong enough and brave enough to hear a bit of strange news to-night, mother?" he asked, flinging off his cap and walking up and down restlessly. "Don't say 'yes' if you ban't; but things have got to be done, and quickly. Only I don't want them to come as a shock and surprise upon you."

"I'm quite equal to hearing what you've been hiding so close these many days."

"I might have guessed you'd seen a bit of it. What don't you see? And you'll swear afore the living God to tell no creature? You'll swear that, mother?"

She grew a little cold and her lips tightened. He spoke in the old ferocious voice, and strode hither and thither in the old tigerish fashion.

"I'll do nothing you don't want me to do, after we've talked it out," she answered, strong in her own power over him.

"Very well, then. And first I must have my coppice money—fifty-seven pounds ten, my share came out at."

"You can draw it from the bank to Tavistock to-morrow."

"That's all right, then. I'm like to be busy to-morrow by the looks of it. Now, mother, listen. Jill Bolt's the matter, and for God's sake don't say a word till I've done. She's being tortured to death—nothing less than that. And I won't suffer it no more. I've put it to her a dozen times that she's a fool to bide there. But some rotten ideas about virtue have kept her in

hell linked to that drivelling fool of a man. And to cut a long story short, she's consented at last, and is going to run away with me to-morrow night."

Mrs. Pomeroy shut her eyes for a moment. Then she rallied and looked at Ives.

"Going to run away? Well, the woman can't do more than that for 'e, to be sure," she said quietly.

He gave a triumphant grunt.

"There! I was right to trust you. You take it like the wonder you are!"

A silence fell for some moments between them. Avisa marshalled all her wits to fight this battle, and her son rejoiced to believe that his mother was on his side. He had largely deluded himself of late, and Jill had helped the process. Now Ives believed that, thanks to his initiative, this great adventure was to befall him. He fancied that his own energies and resistless arguments had brought Jill to his way of thinking, that he had won her to his own idea of wisdom, that he had overborne her feminine scruples, enlarged her mind, and secured her reluctant consent to this romantic step by sheer force of masculine strength and will. In reality, however, Jill had arranged her own plans and thought on ahead a great deal farther than Ives dreamed. She had weighed the chance of this step, and her decision was largely guided by information as yet hidden from young Pomeroy.

"Speak, mother," said Ives. "I want to hear what you've got to say to Jill as a daughter-in-law. Because that's what it's going to be afore any of us are much older."

"You've had your unquiet moments afore you

came to this, my son. You mustn't push me. There's unquiet moments for me just now too. This is a far-reaching thing. I can't speak in a hurry."

"You're not going back on—not that I care if you do. My mind is settled."

She kept silence still. Her thoughts raced swiftly, and she arranged her plan of argument. Somebody must be sacrificed; and that person could only be Jill.

"You can judge how steadfast I am, mother, by my telling you."

"I'm proud to think you set me so high as to tell me, while there was time."

"You'll never change me."

"I know that, but you may change yourself."

He turned sharply.

"Now you are going to argue."

"Not I. But these simple things be just they that have oftenest got a kink in 'em."

"There's no kink in this job, for I've thought it out to the end. I've been getting my plans all cut and dried and waiting for you to grow stronger, and now all's ready and the time has come."

"'Twas like your kind heart to wait for that. And you love me well enough to list to me even now, though I guess how full your thoughts are of t'other man's wife. 'Tis this way, Ives; you must think of her as well as yourself."

"Ban't I thinking of her?"

"Right well I know it; but think deeper. You take her; but you'll never marry her."

"I will, so soon as ever Bolt's divorced her."

"He won't divorce her."

"I'll make him!"

"Nought can make him. That's one side—

hers. Here's another—yours this time. When did Mrs. Bolt say she'd run away with you?"

"On Monday last she had to promise, for I'd take no longer denial."

"I thought so. Did she tell you the news touching Samuel's uncle on Monday last?"

"The latest news is that he's not so well and going down the hill a bit. And that shows to her credit, for she puts me far ahead of the money Bolt will get."

"That's not the latest news of Samuel's uncle. The latest news is that he's going to marry the young woman in his shop. 'Twas to be yesterday. No doubt it's done now."

"Jill didn't know it, then."

"Jill knew it very well, for Samuel told me exactly how she took it when he broke the news."

"What did she care?"

"She cared so much that the very day she heard it, and not sooner, she decided for you."

"You've no right to say a dirty thing like that!"

"I be going to say still dirtier things, and you've got to hear 'em, unless you want your life to be ruined for evermore. Mind, 'tis life or death for you, or I'd never raise my voice against any living creature. Not a word would I say against Jill Bolt if it wasn't your salvation that was in danger. And hers be too, for if he won't divorce her, what's to become of the pair of you?"

"What do we care? She loves me."

"She's wiser far than you, and she knows that, come what may, an honest man like you will stick to her and give her half that's his to the end. But do she think of you as well as herself? She knows Samuel would never divorce her; he'd hold it a wickedness. Therefore she knows that

she can never be your wife, however much she pretends."

"What do we care for the parson's twaddle?"

"That's not here nor there. I suppose you care for them as will follow? I suppose you don't want to get nameless childer? Does this woman look ahead or think or care what will happen to you saddled with another man's wife? 'Tis a great adventure, and like your bold spirit to think of such a thing, but I won't have you hoodwinked into a bad bargain while I can help it. Let her run away if she wants to. Let her run away a hundred times. But why with you?"

"Good God! You can ax that? Don't she love me and only me?"

"Now Sam's money is done for, but not before."

"'Tis a mean thing, mother, to harp on that."

"No, Ives, 'tis a proper thing. She thought that you'd hear nothing of it till afterwards, and she'd have pretended, of course, that she didn't know it. But 'tis that has decided her, not your prayers."

"I know her better far than you. She couldn't be so mean."

"Poor creature, I smart to have to fight her and hurt her behind her back; but 'tis you, or her. She's not honest. She takes Samuel's money from his little store. She'll come to you with a fat purse, mark me. Could you suffer that?"

Avisa talked on earnestly, made some strong points here and there, but conceded to her son certain other points in a manner very masterly. She knew the immense force of a concession to this man's mind. Nothing made him more

tempted to yield himself than to find an opponent yielding. Her argument shifted presently from the welfare of Ives to the welfare of Jill; for she found that subject impressed him most. He was restive when she blamed the woman.

"I won't do no blackguard thing and go back on my word for anybody on God's earth," he said at last.

"Then don't make her go back on hers," answered Avisa quickly. "She's the man's wife, and under oath to him and under oath to Heaven. Why not? Why shouldn't she honour him? He's better than thousands, and a kind and trusting soul. For you to strike such a man! For my strong son Ives to lower himself to rob that poor harmless creature! Like stealing a child's toy!"

So the mother laboured on, and first won a conciliation with respect to her own attitude. Ives admitted that Avisa only desired the best to happen for both parties; and that granted, she continued to plead with him now for Jill and then for herself.

Very gradually she gained a little ground. She probed the wound of his self-esteem delicately yet firmly, and he smarted to think that Jill had been so exceedingly wise on her own behalf. He remembered, though he did not tell his mother, that there had indeed been no abandon about her love until the previous Monday. He could not fail to mark that she had become far more yielding since the news concerning Samuel's uncle. Until then she refused to promise anything definite and denied him the least lover's privileges. After those fleeing fires in the bluebell wood, when she let him carry her across the river, she had maintained a very strict attitude and only

permitted liberty of speech. Ives reflected upon the past, and saw that, despite his denials, there was nothing in the facts that did not chime with his mother's theory. He gasped with secret wonder at her intuition. The day before Jill had coolly told him that she was going to take her husband's savings when she departed, and he had forbidden it and been a little shaken that she could even dream of such a deed.

Hours passed, and still Avisa Pomeroy spoke. The clock whispered three, but neither heard it. The mother was strung up to a tense excitation of mind that could not feel fatigue. Some inner prompting told her that this was the supreme battle of her life for him, and she did not spare herself.

The man listened; now swore and strode this way and that, now sat down again and set out his views. He suffered deeply, and turned and twisted before the steady onslaught. But he listened; he did not fly from the opposition. Reason had its way with him between frantic flashes of unreason, and a play of contending forces strove visibly on the face of Pomeroy. That night lines dawned there never to be ruled out again. Headlong obstinacy, stubborn resistance, injured pride, doubt, love, grief and passion swept in separate or mingled storms across his square forehead; now drew down deep wrinkles to the eyebrows; now swept all smooth at moments of intense thought; now knotted in fury; now flashed downward into the muscles that ran over the cheeks to the mouth; now leapt upwards, when some rare side-laugh at one of his mother's thoughts for a moment banished the haggard care out of his face.

He was firm, but Avisa was firmer. Once or twice she felt a physical collapse threatening her body; yet she persisted, and finally made him promise upon his honour that he would do nothing whatever until he had spoken with her on the morrow.

Then, scarcely seeing the grey dawn, she left him, went up to her chamber, and addressed her further arguments and prayers to her God. Morning was lifted high upon the earth before, in terrible fatigue, she slept. But ere the balm of that blessed anodyne came to rest and relieve the mother, an unusual physical event overtook her: she wept long and bitterly. Since childhood none had ever seen much more than the twinkle of an unshed tear on her face, and very seldom even in secret did sorrow so express itself with her.

She dried her eyes anon, and turned the leaves of her Bible with swift familiar hands; while her son, also waking, tossed upon his bed and planned fresh arguments for the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LETTER

LITTLE WAS SAID during the following morning, though Ives knew that his mother would speak with him before nightfall. He felt shaken but unconvinced. She did not guess how much her words had influenced him, and a great physical exhaustion, from which she suffered on awakening, affected her mind and led her to take a hopeless view of the situation. She grew stronger during the day and nerved herself for the last struggle. Little time remained, because her son had plainly told her that he was going to leave Merivale with Mrs. Bolt in the small hours of the following morning. Jill's preparations would doubtless be made that day; his own, as he had declared, were complete. He intended to be away from Vixen Tor for six weeks; and his share of the money from the cutting of the oak coppice was to pay for it. By that time he imagined that Jill would be divorced and his way clear to marry her.

But a thing happened more significant than Pomeroy's silence during these pregnant moments: he made no more mention of his money and did not go to Tavistock to draw it. Hourly his mother expected him to ask for a cheque; but the

day slipped on past noon and he took no step. Her heart beat high, and even hope came to her. As the time advanced she nerved herself and secretly prayed that she might have but one glimpse into her boy's heart, the better to prevail with him. But his heart was hidden; he even avoided her glances that she might not read his eyes. He slunk through the day, as though ashamed of the past rather than the future. She could not perfectly apprehend his attitude, but suspected that he meant to have Jill at any cost and was ashamed of himself for the determination. She believed that his soul was affirmed to do evil and that he smarted in consequence and went heavily till the night came. Once again in company of the woman, this emotion—this constraint and self-contempt—would doubtless vanish from him. But precious hours yet remained, and Avisa thirsted to be with her son alone.

The mother, however, erred in this theory of Pomeroy's present attitude. Indeed, she overpraised his true emotion. The conscience of Ives it was that tormented him into this gloomy condition and made him more than common saturnine and fierce; but his conscience stabbed with a very different weapon from that Avisa imagined. It may be granted that Ives was suffering, that he was heaping a generous load of self-contempt and scorn upon himself. Further, it must be confessed that he hated himself for what he was going to do: thus far his mother guessed correctly. But her error lay in misjudgment of his reason for grief. He had made up his mind not to run away with Jill; and for that decision he now loathed himself with all his might. He longed for her still; but the high

chivalry and the romance of the proceeding were dust and ashes since he had spoken with his mother. The poetry of this great experience perished out of it when he heard that Jill's act was based on the sordid circumstance of her husband's uncle and his plans. It chimed with a good deal else in her that had jarred on the occasions of their secret meetings. The thought gradually inflamed him to bitter anger, and, having fully digested it, Ives decided that he would not marry Jill.

First he stopped there. He determined with himself that he would run away with her, amuse himself with her, and ultimately leave her to her own devices. It was on the edge of sleep that he came to this conclusion; but it did not bear the light of a waking mind. He rose, and the intention vanished. Then he began to decide anew. But he was now determined not to marry Jill even if he could do so; and since his nocturnal thought seemed vile by daylight, there remained nothing but to abandon the enterprise altogether. It was here that his virile conscience pricked him and made him hang his head. He was not in the least ashamed of himself at the idea of going on; but the decision to stop made him much ashamed. He felt a coward; he pictured Jill's opinion of him when she should learn that he had changed his mind. She would probably ask herself whether there were no men left in the world. She would class him in her mind henceforth with that feeble dust, her husband. To change now must certainly be an act as weak as any that Samuel Bolt had ever committed. Ives spurred himself, loathed himself, and felt unclean in this determination to do rightly. Again and again he cried to his heart that he meant to do right, but

not because it was right. He believed now most steadfastly that she would never have agreed to leave her husband for him until the certainty of a future fortune vanished; and upon this opinion his decision was formed. In some measure Avisa had aided this decision. She had enlarged his angle of mind to the question, sharpened his reason, that was blunted by longing for the woman, and lifted him insensibly to higher thinking and an attitude more adult; but nothing had really availed her save the actual fact of Jill's suspended decision. Pride easily tramples lust under foot in some hearts, and pride conquered with Pomeroy.

He told his mother when evening came, and such was his concentration of mind upon himself that he quite forgot the other side until Avisa reminded him. He had not intended to see or communicate with Jill. He spoke in heat, and uttered oaths and profanities; he made very clear his motive for this change of mind. Blinded by wild anger, he went back on his morning clarity of thought and declared that Jill deserved to be ruined. Then his mother answered him, and with infinite skill took care to utter no word that might add a pang to his smarting spirit.

"You are yourself in this," she said. "And your justice was bound to bring you to it, Ives. 'Tis your ruling passion, and always have been—justice to men and women and children. I'll not be talking now, and I'll not judge your motives, but I will say you've done the wisest thing you could—for her as well as for yourself. There's a large lesson looming ahead for her too. I shouldn't see her to-night. Just write one of your short, swift letters. And don't play about

with reasons. There's nought on God's earth more dangerous than giving reasons for some of the things we do."

"Write to her—why?"

"For her husband's sake. She'll be going to meet you, I suppose."

"I'd forgot that! When I gived up the thought of meeting her, it seemed as if all the world must know it, and her with the rest."

Avisa nodded.

"But as yet she don't know. Better write a line and get it to her to-night—to her own hand somehow."

For answer he turned to the desk in the corner of the kitchen. It was a lofty affair with a high stool. The lid was padlocked, and the receptacle beneath held all the business papers of Vixen Tor Farm.

Ives wrote several letters, swore aloud between each effort, and tore them up one after the other.

"I want to get it into as few words as I can," he said. "I don't intend to write anything small, but, in justice to myself, I must make her see I had a proper reason for changing."

He wrote, and at last satisfied himself; then he blotted his letter, sealed it into an envelope and set the single word 'Jill' upon it.

He did not offer to show it to his mother, and she did not reveal the least interest to learn what it contained.

"That girl will hate me like hell after this," he said.

"She'll come to hate herself quite as badly."

"Yes. And I know what a damned unpleasant feeling that is—nobody better. I hate myself with all my heart this minute."

He rose and took his hat.

"'Tis after nine o'clock," he said. "I'll drop in for a few words with Sammy, or take a message from you to his mother. Then I'll see that she gets this unbeknownst to him."

He left his home and went out into the summer night. It was warm and somewhat close. He thought of the Windystone and the tryst there appointed for three o'clock on the following morning. She would be ready with the few things that she meant to take packed in a bag. He himself had bought her the bag for that purpose.

The squeak of a flute fell on Pomeroy's ear as he approached Mr. Bolt's cottage; but Samuel was on the other side of the road in his mother's home. The window stood wide open and the room was lighted. Old Mrs. Bolt sat smiling with her face turned to her son, while Samuel, with shut eyes and bulging cheeks, played the tune of a hymn: "*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide.*" Upon his arm he still wore a black band for his baby. Samuel's own cottage appeared to be dark save for a gleam of light over the front door; but the kitchen faced upon the other side, and Ives doubted not that Jill was there. A sudden longing struck upon him to go in and see her. But his desires towards her and his new knowledge of her could not live together. He had only to summon the one to cool the other. Now he slipped his letter under the cottage door, then rapped loudly thrice and went his way. She was bound to hear and must see the letter when she entered the lamp-lit passage.

But Jill neither heard nor saw. All was ready for her flight. At two o'clock, when her husband

slept, she meant to leave her home and return no more. She had gone to bed very early that she might enjoy a few hours of sleep before the great exodus. From the other side of the road her husband's flute squeaked faintly, as it ranged over his mother's favourite tunes; and Jill's last waking thought was one of thankfulness that she would never hear the sound again.

When Ives went home Avisa had gone to bed. She knew that he would not want her any more on this night. Therefore she withdrew herself, and he was glad. He felt sore with his mother. The emotion shamed him, but he knew that it was real. He thought of Jill reading his letter and writhed.

Meantime the husband it was, and not the wife, who found that fateful note. Sammy returned home soon after ten o'clock. The house was silent, and he did not doubt that Jill had gone to bed according to her habit. As he locked the front door his eye caught sight of an envelope on the floor, and he picked it up and stared at the solitary word 'Jill' written large across it. Samuel did not know the hand, but felt somewhat interested. Letters seldom came to his house, and when they did, his wife or himself would open them as chance willed. He took down the lamp from a plaster bracket representing an angel, and went into the kitchen. Then he drew himself half a pint of beer and opened Pomeroy's letter to his wife.

Samuel read every word through five times. After doing so, he set down the page and stared before him. So silent and so still he sat that two mice, scurrying hither and thither like

shadows, drew near his boots, found a fragment of food and nibbled there.

Thus wrote the lover:

"DEAR JILL,

"A good deal has happened in my mind since we planned to be off together to-night. I've thought about a few sides of the subject that I hadn't thought of before, and I shan't be at the Windystone to-morrow morning at three o'clock, as arranged. You'll live to see we are better apart and that there is nothing to be gained by ruining yourself on my account. Your husband would never take a divorce. I haven't changed my mind because I'm afraid of anything, or want to do right, or any nonsense like that. It is not because I care a curse for anybody, or anything anybody can do. All the same, I've got a very good reason for changing my mind, and if by chance you can't guess it and think you've a right to know it, I should not hesitate to tell you. And, though I'm doing this, I loved you a lot more than ever you loved me, for all your speeches. But I won't say any more than to hope you'll be happy some day or other. As for me, I don't expect it and don't look for it.

"IVES POMEROY."

Mr. Bolt came slowly to himself after helplessly reading and re-reading this communication. At first he was frightened rather than angry. Once he rose and put on his hat; but he remembered that his mother would be asleep. Then he decided that, as became a man, he would thresh out this tremendous circumstance single-handed. He paused to wonder at his own

courage, then asked himself what he must do. He read the letter again and tried to grasp how much had gone before it. It was clear that Ives Pomeroy and Jill had arranged to run away that night, and that Ives, at the last moment, had changed his mind. Mr. Bolt then permitted himself to wonder what sort of relations had obtained in the past between the pair. This line of thought awoke emotion. It was perhaps hardly worthy to be called anger, but he was certainly very much irritated. He struck the letter in the face with his fist, called Pomeroy a scoundrel, and walked up and down the kitchen; but first he took off his boots that he might not waken Jill overhead. Suddenly a cold sweat burst out all over him. Perhaps she was not overhead; possibly she had already gone to the Windystone. He crept upstairs to see and stood at the open bedroom door. She was in bed and sound asleep. He heard her steady, regular breathing.

Samuel descended again, saw his beer and drank it. He mopped his forehead and read the letter once more. He thought for yet another half-hour; then his mind began to wander and, to his surprise, he grew sleepy. He started up indignantly, read the letter again, and began saying more harsh things of Pomeroy under his breath. Nevertheless he felt thankful that Ives had changed his mind, and he began to wonder what had made him do so. Samuel found his spirit grow milder as the night advanced. He even ventured to hope that it was God who had worked this miracle in the mind of Pomeroy and thus saved all parties. He felt weak and quite worn out, but yet realised that he could hardly

retire without taking some definite step. For the moment Pomeroy might be disregarded, since he was not going to the Windystone; but without a doubt Jill intended to do so. He must, of course, stop that and have it out with her. In his present weary condition the necessity for this deed depressed him. He tried to work himself into a fury with her and failed. He drew himself some more beer and read the letter again. His head kept nodding, and presently he passed beyond recovery and fell very soundly asleep. For nearly two hours he thus remained, and then woke to find the lamp smelling and the light of it reduced to an azure bead of fire.

Samuel came slowly to his senses and sought inspiration. He felt that to fall into a fierce quarrel with Jill at this time of night was physically impossible for him; his system cried aloud for sleep, and he hardly knew how to get upstairs to bed. But his mind gave an expiring flash, even as the lamp had done, and he had a great idea. He lighted a candle, locked up the letter, and went to bed. He had decided upon a terrible revenge. For a moment its dimensions frightened him, and the probable result made him nervous; but he was too far gone even to fear. He decided that he would do nothing at all! Though in itself a plan unheroic, yet the consequences must be very considerable. His silence meant that Jill would presently rise and go off to the Windystone. Samuel fumbled at his buttons and dragged off his clothes.

"People may think it harsh," he mumbled under his breath to himself, "but let 'em; I don't care what they say. 'Tis a fine summer night and warm as milk from the cow. Let her go and

sit there and wait for nought! He won't come; but us'll hope the Lord will, and show my wife her great cruelty and wickedness."

When he lay by sleeping Jill's side and heard her breathing, Samuel's spirits sank and he wept. The immensity of this wrong overwhelmed him. He began to argue that it was not Jill's fault at all, but the man's. He had tempted her with lies, and the devil had helped him. Samuel felt very cold and wretched; but he did not creep close to Jill for warmth as was his custom. "No! I got my dignity," he said to himself.

Some while afterwards she woke him getting up, despite the stealthiness of her movements. He pretended to be still asleep. She dressed in the dark and left the room. He heard her open and shut the door; then her feet sounded outside. He peeped from the window, but it was too dark to see her. His mood had changed. He felt rested and refreshed. An emotion of light-heartedness overtook him. He surprised himself by actually laughing at the picture of Jill waiting for one who would not come. He got back into bed and rolled over to the warm lair that Jill had left. He was just going to sleep again when a new idea, somewhat splendid at first glance, made him sit up and rub his eyes. "How would it be if I was to get in my clothes and go after her and forgive her and bring her back?" he asked himself. He even went so far as to light a candle and put on his socks. Then he took them off again and blew the candle out. "Won't risk it—too dangerous and tragical," he reflected. "She'll be expecting that bad fellow, and if I come up and tell her that he ban't coming, 'tis any odds she'll lose her temper with

me, and say things, or even do things, that us both should much regret. I'll leave her in the Lord's hands. I'll kneel on my knees and lift my soul to Him; I'll . . . I'll . . . 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.'"

Here he sank finally to sleep, and did not wake again until the sun had risen.

Elsewhere Ives Pomeroy, sleepless, tossed and turned, and sometimes, standing at his open window, looked through the darkness to where westerly the Windystone stood on the edge of the Moor. He thought of the silence that two voices had meant to break there. He pictured the ancient granite brooding under night, and a whim woke in him to go forth and keep the promised appointment, even though he knew that the woman would not now do so. He sneered at his folly and returned to bed.

CHAPTER XXV

VIGIL

IN A GAP of the hills, nigh Feather Tor and westerly of the Vixen, stands an old crooked granite post. The Windystone is seven feet high, and from afar suggests some giant human figure bending forward as he tramps the desolation; but seen at hand this memorial of the Middle Ages resolves itself into the symbol of Christianity. Shaft and arms are octagonal and in fair preservation. Centuries of wild weather, flood and frost, have driven the cross out of the perpendicular; time has fretted its angles; mean spirits have bitten the broad arrow into its base; but still the grey stone, clad in venerable vesture of jade and black lichens, shall be seen to stand nobly upon the heath. It glitters by day with the transparent quartz crystals that form a part of its amorphous substance, and by night withdraws into a formless shadow against the sky. A streamlet winds beside it and sings the primeval song of moving water. The burn carries on her breast shining stars of crowfoot, and these open their little silver eyes almost at the foot of the cross lifted above them.

Hither came Jill Bolt under the stars and sat her down and waited. She used the Windystone

for a support, cast her new bag beside her, and turned her face to the east. Thence must come Ives Pomeroy and the dawn, and she felt as sure of the one as the other. Their future together had been pretty fully planned on the assumption that Samuel would divorce Jill at the earliest opportunity. Then Ives had arranged to marry her and bring her home to Vixen Tor Farm as his wife. He had rather more than fifty pounds to spend, and she had saved twenty-five. This was her own, and she carried it in her pocket now.

Jill was early, and rather regretted that she should have first arrived. She spent the minutes that separated her from the man by considering her attitude towards him. She liked him well enough; it might even be said that she loved him; but her present desperate proceeding was purely selfish, and she had not finally determined to trust herself with him until all hope of worldly prosperity with Samuel was at an end. Had Mr. Bolt's uncle remained a bachelor and continued calmly to decline, she would have endured Samuel until the last; and this the more readily because she suspected that her husband himself was not likely to be a long-lived man. He coughed a great deal and, as his wife, she marked many signs which pointed to low vitality. But now that the Plymouth bookseller was about to marry, the hope of the Bolts had disappeared, and Jill perceived that, even though she waited for Samuel's death, it must leave her a widow nearly penniless. Pomeroy promised no very great earthly prosperity; but he was a man, and Vixen Tor Farm appealed a good deal more to Jill than her home at Merivale. What Mrs. Pomeroy would say or do, she did not consider. The

subject indeed often struck her mind through these desperate days, but she banished it.

Sampford Spiney church clock struck three and Jill strained her ears for the step of Ives. Light began to be felt rather than seen and the eastern hills were defining themselves; but the world still slept; the stars still shone overhead and the water at her feet still reflected their light. Waking creatures shambled past Jill. Mares and little foals went by; cattle stirred and blew sleep from their nostrils and rose out of their beds in the fern. They loomed gigantic in the darkness, and their sounds slowly sank away as they passed to their haunts. Jill got up, shivered a little, took her bag, and walked to the granite ledges of Feather Tor where they extended above the Windystone. She felt uneasy, for the man was ten minutes late. Pure silver light stole over the sky and drowned the stars, but the earth was still very dark. Birds called; the world revolved to the sun, and soon a rusty red lattice and tangle of dim fire fretted the east. The hour was half-past three and the Moor stretched stark to Vixen, but no sign of Ives appeared upon the path that he should have trodden an hour ago.

Jill stared at the sky, while anger heated her blood and banished the cold begot of nightly vigil. False and perjured always from his youth up, he had been true to himself even at this crisis, had rejected the thing so long hungered and yearned for even at the moment when it became his own. The sun would be shining in half an hour, and it became necessary for Jill to disappear in one direction or another. To run away alone was absurd; therefore she chose the alternative and went quietly back to Merivale before the village

should be waking. Even as she went she turned often and looked along his way. But he did not come. At last the road was hidden, and she walked on and felt that a vital chapter of her life's story had slipped from it. The chapter that she had sketched so carefully, Fate refused to insert in her life. A void must henceforth exist: a section planned but never executed.

She strove to hold her judgment in suspense, but failed. She tried hard to assume a good reason for the absence of Ives, but could not. Nothing but death, or some physical catastrophe that had deprived him of the power to come to her, might explain his defection in any manner to be endured. But she felt positive that no misfortune had overtaken him. She chose rather to remember his unstable character and to suspect that he had really changed his mind at the last possible moment and not been at the trouble to let her know it. She hated him very heartily as she went home. He had made her a fool in her own eyes—perhaps in the eyes of others. She determined on a bitter reckoning if he could not clear himself.

Jill found her husband sleeping very heavily. She restored to their usual places the things in her bag; she locked up her money in a little desk. She changed her gown, and hid her soaking boots and stockings for the present. Then she went down and lighted the fire.

Interesting emotion overtook her spirit during these processes. She moved among objects to which she had bidden eternal farewell; she performed duties which she had seen and felt herself perform for the last time. The anti-climax sickened her. For relief she flung herself into the full storm that now filled her heart against

Pomeroy. Furious fires burnt in her soul. She raged, and the white heat and scorch of her spirit did her good and sweetened the sick air of her mind. The tornado passed. She smoothed her forehead and prepared her husband's breakfast. He was late, and she went out to the cottage door for a time and spoke to a neighbour. Her object was to learn if anything unusual had been reported from Vixen Tor Farm, but there came no news, good or bad. Jill, however, heard something that interested her not a little and promised a possibility of light in the darkness.

Mr. Joel Toop, who always rose an hour earlier than his brother, appeared driving a cart. He was taking a sow and her litter into Tavistock market. Jill exchanged greetings and Mr. Toop explained his gloom.

"You'll see me looking wisht and down in the mouth, Mrs. Bolt. This is a black day for me and Peter and the Jolly Huntsmen. 'For why?' you ask. Because that silly woman, Ruth Rendle, be leaving us. Whoever would have thought that a creature reckoned to be full of sense really had so little when it came to the point?"

"Really going?"

"Yes; to be a sort of all-round useful help and companion to Mrs. Pomeroy at Vixen Tor. I never would sanction it, and I don't now. However, she's going—for a time—short or long. We've got a new barmaid."

He went on his way, and Jill thought that she began to apprehend. It was not news to her that Ruth was going to Vixen Tor. Ives had told her all about it long ago, and rejoiced, on his mother's account, that it should be so, because Ruth would take his place while he was away

with Jill. But now the fact, from being insignificant, swelled at every outline and bulked huge as a thundercloud.

Still the exhausted Samuel slept; therefore Jill wakened him. He sat up, rubbed his eyes and stared.

"You!" he said.

"Yes, I suppose so. Who should it be?" she asked. "Get up—your meat's cold—'tis nearly seven o'clock."

"Ban't going to work to-day," he answered slowly.

"Not going to work—why not?"

"For a lot of reasons. Firstly, the engine's not to be out, and what I've got to do to it I can do on Monday early afore I get steam; at least that's not the first reason, but 'twill serve well enough."

He began to dress. A strange sensation struck him that it was improper to put on his clothes before this woman any more; she had gone out of his life. Then he perceived that she had evidently come back into his life again. Hope rose in him. She might have run away altogether; instead she had chosen to return of her free will and without the least interference. This argued well in Samuel's opinion. He rose and descended to find Jill outwardly in a placid mind. She had prepared a good breakfast for him, and he marked one or two little actions that she had performed on his behalf. These were often omitted. Doubtless this terrific lesson began to bear fruit already. He fancied that Jill had a slight cold, and expressed a fear to that effect. He felt himself yielding and anger dropping from his heart.

"Drink another cup of tea along wi' me," he said.

She obeyed.

He found the letter on his lips a score of times, but delayed that horror as long as possible.

Jill began to wash up, and Samuel watched her.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Nothing in particular—unless . . ."

An idea suddenly struck him. He dimly guessed the unfathomed depths of discomfort in Jill's mind, and it occurred to him that she ought to be distracted after her recent tragical experiences. Moreover, he felt that it might be easier to tell her the truth after an interval.

"I suppose you wouldn't care to come to Tavistock Cattle Fair and Revel to-day?" he asked. "'Twill be a gay business, and I feel you haven't had a holiday for long. I'll put on my best, and take the band off my arm, if you'll come."

Rather to his surprise, and much to his satisfaction, she consented.

"I'll go if you're set on it."

"That's all right, then. Us'll smarten up a bit and get off in an hour's time."

The day passed prosperously, and Jill was glad to meet various neighbours, including Rupert Johnson from Vixen Tor.

Samuel, for his part, lost no opportunity to please his wife and spent a good deal of money on her account, though his own pleasure was spoiled by the recollection of what must come at the end of the day. Mr. Bolt longed to destroy Pomeroy's letter altogether and forget it; but that was not possible. It seemed to him necessary for future peace that Jill should learn the truth. The ordeal loomed large and destroyed his

content. Indeed, he grew nervous towards evening.

It was past ten o'clock when they returned home, and nearly eleven before they had finished their supper. Then Samuel went to his desk, unlocked it, and produced the letter.

"I'm sorry I've got to end this beautiful day in rather a serious manner," he said; "but there's some things didn't ought to be put off too long, and this is one of 'em, in my opinion. Here's a letter from Ives Pomeroy to you, Jill."

The woman started and put out her hand for it.

"I must tell you that it comed pretty late last night, when you was in bed and asleep. And as your husband and a man from who you didn't ought to have secrets, I found it when I got home, and I read it. I may tell you, Jill, that it upset me a great deal, and I ban't going to make light of it even now. My first thought was to do something rash and desperate; but I didn't. Please to read it through; then I've got a bit more to say."

She took the letter and read it slowly; then she put it down on the table, leant back in her chair, and crossed her hands over her breast.

"Go on," she said. Jill believed that she had long since fathomed Samuel, but here was a depth of pusillanimity almost inconceivable. Mr. Bolt, however, did not think so. He evidently held that his course of action had been rather severe.

"You see how 'twas. I came home to find you on the verge of destruction, but this here letter told me the destroyer had changed his evil mind. And what had changed it, d'you reckon? Why, the only Person that's got the power to

do such a thing, namely, God Almighty. So that settled the matter as far as Ives Pomeroy was concerned. I left him in higher hands than mine, Jill, though I feel a bit dangerous still when I think of him. Then I had to consider about you. Well, of course I knowed that somehow he'd got you to promise to do this wicked thing. You was the weaker vessel, and you'd always had a bit of a feeling for the man, and no doubt his cunning words foxed you into thinking that he loved you better than what I do."

"Why for didn't you wake me last night and have this out then?"

"Because—for several reasons. One was I hadn't the heart. You must remember this comed as a terrible shock to me; it made my flesh water and my bones jelly. I've gone my way and never dreamt of such a thing in all my life. I quite thought that you and me and mother was all settling down again and getting along perfectly smooth and comfortable. Especially since mother promised only to come in once a week. And I felt very low about it, I can tell you, last night at midnight, with the silence of the grave all round about and not a hand to comfort me."

"Why didn't you come upstairs and pull me out of bed by the hair and cut my throat?"

"'Twould only have been one more nastiness in the newspapers. I hope to God, whatever happens, I shall never get in print; besides, I'm not that sort. But I said to myself, stern-like, that you'd got to suffer, Jill. You mustn't take it too harshly in me, but I felt very strong that my bounden duty was to let you suffer a bit. So what did I do, but just harden my heart against you,

and go to bed, and let you march off to cool your heels and wait for the rascal. And I thought the cross of Christ up-along, in the shape of the Windystone, might very likely do the rest; and I'm sure I hope it have, Jill. And I don't think as a reasonable woman, who's just escaped making a proper mess of her life, that you can say the punishment I ordained was too heavy for you. To be frank with you, I very nearly rose up and came to fetch you after daylight; but 'no,' I said to myself, 'I'll let her suffer to the bitter end, for her soul's sake.' 'Twas my unsleeping love for you made me do it, Jill, and you oughtn't to think none the worse of me for it."

"I was mad."

"You was; but they smooth-tongued men—very few can stand against them. However, God don't forget a sparrow."

"Be you going to forgive me for this bit of wickedness?"

"Certainly I be," he answered. "I forgived you this morning when you woke me and told me that breakfast was ready. And—and take my word for it, he wouldn't have worn very well."

"Never mention his name again to me."

"I don't want to. Let him go to his reward. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' But the thing is to know how us all stand now. You see, if he's to hear that I had your letter and that I read it, then he'll naturally expect me, as a wronged husband, to do something sharp. There's a worldly side to this, and there's my manhood. At the least I ought to go to the length of being vexed with the man in public. I ought really to pull his nose afore the people."

"You ought to break his blasted neck."

"No, Jill, I'm a Christian first and a husband afterwards, as we all should be."

"Best way out is to let him think I had the letter and never went to the Windystone at all."

"I'm afraid 'twould be acting a lie, however."

She stared at him.

"God's truth! What stuff be you built of?" she said. "Not true? Perhaps not; but a long way better than the truth, I should reckon. You'm such a peace-loving and patient man that you ought to jump at it. That plan lets you out altogether. Nobody need ever know the—the pretty truth."

"Of course I'd very much rather have it so, if 'tis within the bounds of honesty."

"To hide the truth ban't to tell a lie. Leave the rest to me; and leave the man to me. My quarrel's quite so big as yours—maybe bigger."

"I must ask you to have nothing more to do with him," said Mr. Bolt firmly; "that I demand, Jill. I have my feelings too, and they've been a good bit rasped by this job. I'll go further and order you—order you on your oath—to swear you'll never speak to him, or write to him, or open a letter from him as long as you live, so help you God."

"Better leave it at that, then. I'll swear anything you like."

"So be it," he answered. "Now tear up that letter and we'll go to bed."

"I'll read it again once in the morning," she replied. "There's a lot to be learned of men and their ways from such a letter. And, as you've been so big-hearted over this, I'll ask you one thing. Ban't the time for me to beg favours, I know. I ought to be on my knees afore you;

but all the same, I do beg and pray of you not to tell your mother, Samuel. Don't make me out any wickeder in her eyes just when she is beginning to think a bit better of me. I'm a repentant and contrite woman, and God knows it."

"I never meant to tell her," he answered. "Not my mother, or any other person, will ever hear of last night's work from me."

She put away the little presents that he had bought her at Tavistock, slipped Pomeroy's letter into her pocket, extinguished the lamp, and followed her husband upstairs.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TIDE EBBS

CHANCE TIMED Ruth Rendle's coming to Vixen Tor so that it served a good purpose to the man she loved. Never had Ives stood in such need of distraction from his own mind as at the present; never had he so fretted and beat the unbending bars of circumstance. His spirit was very sore; for some time he continued impatient of his mother's company, and she well understood with what he associated her and kept out of his way as much as possible. The task was the more difficult for Avisa, because she knew what Ives did not: that her illness gained upon her unseen. For a time his own tribulations blinded him; then rose the dawn of other interests, and after Ruth Rendle had been a month at the farm he began to perceive the significance of her presence. She avoided him, but, unknown to herself, her secret swiftly slipped from her into the keeping of the mother.

They spoke together one night while Avisa sat up for Ives. She had denied herself these evenings for some weeks, that she might not force the past upon him by her presence. Then the son expressed a desire for her company again, and thankfully she granted it.

Upon this night the talk first ran on Northmore. He had broken his collar-bone in a fall when hunting. Ives visited him and found him unfriendly. Mr. Peter Toop also called upon the sufferer, and to him Matthew had confessed a weariness and hatred of life. At the farmer's earnest entreaty Ruth Rendle also went to see Matthew; and she took a little gift of heather honey from Mrs. Pomeroy. Afterwards, though she concealed much that passed between them, she, too, related to Avisa how Northmore had cried against his fate and cursed the business of living.

"Cruel changed from what once he was," she said. "And he haven't got a word of thanks for his fortune because of his misfortune, though Mr. Toop tells me he's wonderful prosperous with his cattle."

"Folk down on their luck find no time to sort the good that happens to 'em from the ill. And if you remind 'em, they think you hard-hearted. Past good fortune never yet healed present bad."

"Can't you go and see him, such power as you have, Mrs. Pomeroy?"

Avisa shook her head.

"No use, I'm afraid. We understand one another. 'Tis a terrible thing when a man comes to love hopelessly at his age. A young chap can get over his disappointments in time; but such as him are different. After love's melted 'em once into its mould and they've run hard into it, there's no changing. They'll break, but they can't thaw."

There was a silence, and Ruth remembered incidents now far past and made an artless confession.

"I was cruel vexed with you once, if you can believe it. Right down savage, and on Matthew Northmore I poured out my anger."

"How did I come to anger you so much?"

"'Twas that sad business long ago when Ives —went away for a bit—you remember."

"Yes, I remember. And do you?"

Ruth rose, sat beside the mother and took her hand.

"In my ignorance I stood up in the bar that night to the Jolly Huntsmen and rated Northmore and stung him with the bitterest words I could call up! Yes; he said you was right and a brave, good, true mother to do what you did do; and I flamed out, like the fool I was, and dared to tell 'em you was no true mother—God forgive me."

Avisa's hand tightened on the other's.

"D'you think so still?"

"No—you were right."

Another still lengthier silence fell, and Mrs. Pomeroy leisurely considered all that was hidden in Ruth's confession. For a moment she guessed that the girl had chosen this way to make implicit confession of the truth; then she dismissed the idea. No such subtlety belonged to Ruth. She had let out her secret innocently, and the question next rose in the mother's mind whether to ignore or to acknowledge it. She suspended her inclination and only argued with herself for the greatest good to Ives. To a mother's heart this seemed a most natural circumstance, and she rejoiced with great joy at the discovery. She did not doubt very long as to her own action, but turned suddenly, put her arms round the other's neck and kissed her.

"And yet you could come here?" asked Avisa.

But Ruth, ignorant of the connecting links in Mrs. Pomeroy's mind, supposed this question related to the speaker herself and her past adverse opinion.

"I could. I'd have come across the world to you."

"Ruth," she answered, "you've told me what I'd rather have heard than anything human speech could utter, but one thing. Ruth, you love Ives, and 'tis the most blessed thought to me that you love him. Go on loving him, for God's sake. Never stop loving him; be patient; be true and leave the rest to—not to me—but to the Lord. Oh, woman, he's good—better than you know. From you much may be hid, but not from me. He's a big-hearted man, and life's teaching him a lot of precious things. He's done brave deeds that only I know about, and—and . . . Go on loving him, Ruth. 'Tis beautiful of you to love him—to love him so secret and so steadfast. 'Tis beautiful, and only my own Ruth would rise to it . . ."

The girl did not answer. She was crying, half in shame, half in joy.

"Forgive," she said at last. "I oughtn't to have come here, but you called, and my heart and duty seemed to jump together. Don't fear about it. I've let it out to you, like a fool; but he'll never know. Trust me for that."

"He's growing wiser and wiser, Ruth. Twice a day I pray that he'll grow wise enough to offer you marriage afore I die. But if he don't, I'll still die happy, even if 'tis a very selfish happiness, because you've told me this."

They kissed each other again, and Ruth disappeared at the sound of Ives approaching. He

came in moody and out of temper, and Avisa, turning her mind swiftly to his, stilled the joyful throb of hope, sat beside her son with folded hands.

"You'm glum, dear heart," she said.

"Yes, I'm glum, and there's enough to make me so. If a man has prided himself on being a man and he breaks down and sinks away from manliness, that's enough to make him glum. A cur—a coward. . . . I was trying to forget it; but —to-night—I met one—I met two—as made me remember it cruel sharp."

"Eat a bit while you tell me."

He began his supper, and ate and drank for some time without more words. Then he put down his empty mug abruptly and spoke.

"I came face to face with her this afternoon—in a spot without any eye to mark us. I felt I had a right to know if she'd seen the sense of my letter, not to mention its inner meaning. I felt I had a right to know if she wanted to hear any more. I've always hungered to tell her the truth about her infernal selfishness. So I spoke straight and bade her 'good afternoon' quite civil. Then I said, if 'twas all the same to her, I'd like to have a five minutes' tell with her."

"I can guess the rest," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"I'll swear you can't."

"She didn't heed; she didn't speak; she just went by."

"You're right, by God! She looked through me as if I was a pane of glass. Not a tremble, not a wink of her eyelashes. By she went with a cloam pitcher of water, and t'other arm stretched out to balance the weight. Cut me, with such a scorn as I never dreamed of; and the mark of her loathing in her screwed-up nose—as if something

was dead and she'd just got a whiff of it. Hell and fury! I'll strangle her if ever she goes by me like that again!"

They talked far into that night, and presently Ives began to smoke. The circumstance brought his mother's mind round to Ruth again, because among the presents received by Ives on his last birthday was a little matchbox from her hand. This trifle Avisa remembered, and now she marked that her son carried it.

Mrs. Pomeroy made no mention of Ruth that night, or that week, although the girl was hot in her heart. She delayed until a fitting moment. But meantime the grandmother of Ives, coming to certain conclusions without assistance, actually did the thing Avisa delayed to do, and challenged the man bluntly and strongly on the subject of Ruth.

They were alone together, and Ives, putting his hand into his pocket, was reminded of a circumstance by something he found there. With an exclamation of contempt he drew forth a little pamphlet of a few pages and flung it across the table to old Jane, who put on her glasses, examined it, and read the text beneath a picture:

"*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word.*"

"One of them methody tracts. Did you pick it up?" she asked.

"'Pick it up!' No. A man gived it to me. Going through Merivale a bit ago, Sammy Bolt stopped me and asked for the favour of a word. Then he said, 'Will you be so kind as to promise to do me a service, Mr. Pomeroy?' Of course I said I would if I could. Then he pops this

twaddle into my hand. 'You've promised,' he said. 'And I hope you'll keep your word. All I want for you to do is to read every syllable.' With that he made off so fast as his legs could carry him."

"He'm like a good few others that would do you a service and willingly, if you'd but let 'em. Never was such a man as you for getting between hisself and the light. Come in the garden out of earshot and give me your arm. I want to talk to you."

He rose.

"Talk!" he said, "what's the good of talking? There's only one subject and only one person I care about in this world now; and that's mother."

"Well, let's talk about her, then. You want to make her happy, don't you?"

"What more can I do? I've let it be known that if anybody frets her, by so much as a hair, I'll be the death of 'em."

"You know what your mother thinks of Ruth Rendle."

"Quite right, too. Ruth's a godsend here."

"A proper li'l fairy in the house, I call her. And—and—I tell you—there 'tis—how can I put it afore you—you so blind and deaf as you are!"

"You mean you want me to marry her? Well, I'm off all that for evermore, grandmother. Once bit, twice shy. I'll keep clear of the girls henceforth. You can't plan these things. I've got a great respect for Ruth. Anyway, I'd wish her a better husband than the likes of me. She's good and straight. She's learnt a lot from mother."

"You'll never get a better; you'll . . ."

He began to grow violent and use evil language.

"Stop it," he said. "How can you be so damned selfish—to the girl? Like enough Ruth hates the sight of me, and well she may. I won't hear no more of this from anybody. Another syllable and—and I'll get out of it and not come back."

"Go, and kill your mother by going—that's a clever thought."

Ives stormed for two minutes, then he went off. When he returned later the old woman had gone to bed, and he spent the evening with Avisa and Ruth. He made the latter read Samuel's tract aloud, and he watched her face while she did so. She had some charms that he had not marked. Her hands were pretty, and if her lips did not cry for kisses, yet they were beautiful. Her voice was soft and clear also.

The women chid Ives when he scoffed at the sermon, but, for once, his mother seemed less swift of mind than usual. Guessing that she suffered, her son made her go to bed, and when she had gone, he talked with Ruth a little and tried to get a glimpse of her heart. But he failed. She had long grown accustomed to his presence and could bear herself with perfect self-control before him. Life under the same roof with him taught her a great deal more concerning his failings and virtues than she had ever known. It helped her to understand him, but it did not hinder her from loving him.

She spoke now of his mother and could not find it in her to echo his hopes for the future. Then, marking that she did not agree with him, Ives went to the opposite pole and became pessimistic.

"I try to hide what I think," he said, "and take a cheerful view; but don't suppose I don't really know all that you know, and much more too. She can't hide anything from me. I know her far better than anybody else in the world knows her. No nature in her now, the darling dear. Always finger-cold on the warmest day, and her face do seem yellow to me instead of the nut-brown it used to be."

She consoled him and grew hopeful in her turn. She spoke of little incidents to show the mother's vitality and energy were still strong; but he would none of them.

"Such things she does for love of her kind and by great, terrible efforts. You see the things done, but only I know what goes to 'em. She's fading out."

Three days later, as if to prove Pomeroy in the right, there came cold news that Avisa could not rise. She had not slept, and felt it would be better to stop in bed until midday.

Ives rushed up at once, and having seen her haggard face, departed to Tavistock for a doctor.

"'Tis the beginning of the end," said Jane to Emmanuel Codd, when he had ridden off. "Her light be burning low, and when it starts to flicker, 'tis only a question of time how long afore 'tis gone."

"And my pension never settled," he answered. "Poor hopes for me if I'm to lie at his mercy."

"She forgets nought; even in her hours of little ease she's always calling home somebody," replied Jane. "You'm thought upon long ago, I expect."

Ives returned with the physician, and waited impatiently for an hour until he heard the truth.

Then he learned that his mother might live till Christmas, or even into another year. But her end was at hand.

"She knows it," said the doctor kindly; "and she knows the time better than I do, for she can judge her own reserves of strength in a remarkable manner. She is calm and content. I've made everything clear to the young woman upstairs, and your mother will not suffer again as she suffered last night."

Pomeroy did not go to Avisa then, but took his horrified heart with him to the Moor, when a lifeless and sodden hour in late October brooded over fitting theatres for grief. Heavy concourse of vapour smothered the high points of the land and emptied secret cisterns upon the peaks and ridges of the mountains. From the tors ran down much water to the valleys, and the grey world wept.

CHAPTER XXVII

WANING LIGHT

AVISA POMEROY still rose and descended to the house-place when her strength permitted it; but these occasions grew rarer, and presently ceased. A nurse assisted Ruth, and since the mistress could no longer move among her people, the life of the farm came to see her, and still revolved about her sinking fires.

At this season her son terribly tried all those with whom he had to deal. He was morose and utterly absorbed in his own supreme grief. As the time for his mother's departure grew nearer, his anguish increased, and many feared to approach or address him. He kept much apart, when not with Avisa, and he wandered far afield. His thoughts led him to the inevitable loneliness so close at hand, and he debated of his own life when she should be gone out of it. Then he cursed himself that he could think of life at all without her. Of late years she had grown to be a large part of his days.

Christmas approached, and the folk began to regard any chance sight of Avisa Pomeroy as the last. Most of those who knew her sought opportunity to see her once again and speak with her; but the person she herself sought refused to

come. Lizzie and her husband arrived at Christmas, and, without the knowledge of Ives, his mother sent a private message to the younger Mrs. Bolt by Lizzie. She begged that Jill would call to see her; but Samuel's wife declined the invitation cautiously.

"You can tell your mother that I'm not coming. I mind very well that she was kind and useful to me; but what she've got to say to me I'll take as said."

After this speech Jill thought a few more words; but she did not utter them. In her mind she reflected that those laugh best who laugh last. She continued to ignore Ives, and enjoyed to pass him as though unconscious of his presence; but she guessed, Avisa once gone, that it might be possible if she pleased again to waken his slumbering fires. Herein, however, she erred. The man was not destined ever more to desire her; and his mother knew it. Lizzie delivered Jill's message, which was a mystery from her point of view, and Avisa assured her daughter that this answer caused her no surprise. The sick woman's fading thoughts only concerned her son, and she did not guess the difficult problems that he presented to the rest of the household when beyond earshot of her room.

Arthur Brown especially provoked Ives, and the latter, now unhinged somewhat and more than usually dead to reason and patience, often found his brother-in-law's reflections and comments on the situation to be more than he could bear. Brown's principles were quite equal to the strain, and his complacent calm awoke explosion after explosion.

There came a day, early in the new year, when

Lizzie broke down and wept before the company at dinner.

"You are too much in the house, my dear," said Arthur. "This afternoon I must ask you to come for a short stroll with me, to take the air and fortify your nerves."

Her husband never spoke twice to Lizzie, and presently, drying her eyes, she walked out with him. The day was cold and the Moor stretched sleeping round about them. A light wind shrilled in the dead heath bells. Day died slowly, and no flame of sunset woke the west upon that eventide. They passed along upwards, and presently reached the Windystone and the stream that crept beside it. A sort of suspended life inhabited all things and marked even the running water.

Mr. Brown found a sheltered spot, and sat down with his face to the cross; while Lizzie took a seat beside him.

"It is most necessary that those who nurse the sick should themselves keep in rude health," said her husband. "You must consider that and not allow your natural and proper love for a good mother to blind you to the laws of physical health. Ives also has to be reckoned with. I pray, after the sad event is a thing of the past, that he may become more reasonable; for the moment, I must own myself defeated."

"God knows what'll become of him when mother dies."

"Exactly: God knows. We have that inestimable certainty."

"But what will happen? What will he do?" she cried out. "D'you think I ought to stop with him for a while—after? Of course Ruth can't."

"I have already considered the point," he answered. "I have decided that you stop with him exactly one fortnight subsequent to the decease—no more and no less. I shall permit that; indeed, I wish it. The vacation ends four days hence and I return to my duties. You will stop and close your mother's eyes, just as I did for both my own parents. And, from the date of the interment, you will remain fourteen days with your poor brother."

"It is very, very good of you, Arthur, to let me."

He did not contradict her. Instead he ran lightly over the seven deadly sins, traced their main arteries in the human mind, and confessed that none of them had so much as tempted him to the slightest experiment.

"Perhaps, if I have a besetting weakness, Lizzie, it is intellectual pride," he admitted.

"You've got wonderful self-respect, Arthur."

"Yes; and now I try to preserve self-respect with poor Ives. One must go on treating him as a grown-up child and striving to be hopeful."

"His tenderness with mother is beautiful, Arthur. She'd rather have him touch her than the nurse."

"Maternal instinct, Lizzie. She thinks a great deal about him, even when I am discussing other matters with her."

"He can't look forward. He can't look back. He's terrible."

"Remorse would be a healthy mark of progress. But it appears to make him so exceedingly short-tempered. That may be an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace—I say it *may* be."

"There is Ives," said Lizzie. "He's been

riding to Tavistock and come back this way. He goes down for nice things, and poor mother tries hard to eat 'em."

Ives showed no inclination to join them. He was walking his horse, and Lizzie called to him to stop. They approached him then and all returned together. The young man carried a few parcels.

"I got some black grapes—best berries in Tavistock," he said. "You must make her eat a few, Lizzie. They'll freshen her up."

"I shouldn't force her, however, if I may advise," said the schoolmaster. "Nature tells the sufferer . . ."

"Who wants to force her? Black grapes are the proper thing for sick people, and they always cry out for 'em. Very like she's longing for 'em, only wouldn't ask."

They kept silence for some time until, beside a hedge, where the naked blackthorns were brushed with ripe fruit, Mr. Brown spoke again.

"A pity to see this harvest of the hedgerow neglected," he remarked. "Sloes—the fruit of prunus spinosa—make an excellent cordial; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that an excellent cordial may be made from them."

Ives uttered a sound of intense exasperation.

"Oh, hell!" he said. "I can't stand much more of you, Arthur. When do you go back to teach the children? Thank the Lord I was born too early for you to teach me."

"I wish I could teach you, Ives," answered his brother-in-law. "But life's the only schoolmaster will ever get anything into your head, I'm afraid."

"Don't fear: you're doing your share too.

You're part of life and you're teaching me a trifle here and there: teaching me to be patient and meek as Moses—teaching me—oh, a deuce of a lot of things not worth knowing."

"I wish I could make you forget one or two things also, Ives."

"Wish you could. You'll make me forget how to laugh afore long; though 'tis a lot else beside you be doing that."

"Little enough to laugh at in the world, certainly."

"Little that's pleasant; so them as must laugh will have to fall back upon what ban't—such things as you, for instance."

"Nobody but a fool laughs at a wise man."

"But all men laugh at anybody who thinks himself wise. There's a rod in pickle for all you perfect chaps. We'll live to see you come a mucker yet, Arthur—if the devil thinks you worth tempting, which I doubt."

With this prophecy Ives left them and rode forward. For once, Brown had put him into a good temper, for Pomeroy was conscious of having beaten his brother-in-law in argument. He returned home, therefore, in a spirit more amiable than usual to find Mr. Cawker and his daughter waiting in the kitchen.

Moleskin had brought a brace of golden plover.

"We've ventured to ax if the missis can see us for a few seconds," he said. "From all accounts it may be the last time, and 'twill be good to know to our own dying hour we've paid that great woman a bit of respect. Can she let down food still? These here were killed yesterday."

"Thank you for coming."

"And, if you please, my mother sends respect-

ful words; and she prays to meet Mrs. Pomeroy on the golden shore afore long, Mr. Ives," said Mary.

"Her soul shines through your mother's body, like the moon through a ghost," declared Moleskin. "'Twas always so with her. A fool can read such goodness: 'tis the very writing of God on the forehead—like the light that broke out on the face of Moses. 'Tis a great addition to life to have known her."

"And I love her, Mr. Ives, because she seed so swift that Rupert Johnson was getting addicted to me, and let him walk home with me."

Ives nodded.

"'Tis all true," he said. "'You and this here woman"—he pointed to Ruth, who had just entered—"you three people, and myself, and another here and there, be the only ones who really understand all my mother is. Never was such another, and never will be."

Ruth had gone upstairs, but quickly returned.

"Mrs. Pomeroy would like to see you both now, Mr. Cawker," said Ruth.

One by one the friends and closer acquaintance of her life took leave of Avisa: then came a Saturday when her son-in-law beheld her alive for the last time.

She was unusually well upon this forenoon, and those she best loved assembled beside her and listened to her speeches. Her thoughts turned a good deal upon the past.

"How quickly it has run away—my life!" she said. "Like water after rain—like a stream in the sand. Seems but yesterday I was a little maid to school. Then comed the wonder of

courting, and falling in love, and losing. Awful my time looked when your father died—awfully long and awfully empty. But here's the end of it—slipped away like a dream—and I'll be seeing him again afore the birds pair."

"You'll mind the messages, won't 'e, dear?" said old Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Don't you fear I'll forget, mother."

"You was a very proper wife to him always, Avisa, and his life was the better and happier by you. That's a great blessing for you to remember."

"I brought laughter to him. 'Tis a good thing in its way. 'No man married to my wife could take hisself too serious.' Often he said them very words."

"And true words," answered Jane. "Not that he ever did value himself over much, even in his youth. You was one of them women who can bring out the flavour of a man if you love him. A great fellow-feeler you, Avisa. All manner of people have found that out."

"Think of all the folk that dearly love to come over here for a tell with you, mother," said Lizzie.

Ives spoke not, but he listened intently.

Long afterwards he remembered the chance latter utterances of his mother and strung them together in his mind. To him they were precious gems, each the bright home of a memory. The last thoughts of Avisa's fading brain seemed sacred things to him. He treasured them and never forgot them.

On this occasion she spoke of Mr. Joel Toop, after her son had grumbled about him.

"Won't praise a cabbage in a neighbour's

garden; but always expects people to make no end of fuss when they see his," said Ives.

"There's a lot like that: they shut one eye when they look at other people's good things—to make 'em seem smaller," she answered.

Presently Arthur Brown read the Bible to her, while the rest listened, and Ives well remembered his grandmother's horror and the schoolmaster's uneasiness at Avisa's comments on a certain scene. Arthur rehearsed a chapter from Kings that told of Elisha, the rude little ones, and the beasts:

"And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them," he concluded without emotion.

"'Twas a wonder some of they poor frantic mothers didn't tear the prophet," said Avisa Pomeroy. As she spoke, the faint humorous image of her old self shone in her eyes a moment, like afterglow of sunset.

None saw her actual leave-taking of Mr. Brown, for she sent them out while she bade him farewell.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON THE WINGS OF THE MORNING

NOW AVISA POMEROY constantly planned to have her son and Ruth beside her. She sank into lengthened silences at the turn of the new year, and the old swift play of her mind grew slower. Ives often read aloud; and while he did so, his mother's eyes alone moved as she turned them from her son to Ruth, from the young woman back again to Ives. It seemed as though her darkening glances sought to spin a bond between them, and played, like a shuttle, back and forth, to entangle these two hearts in one net of love. But grief reigned over both, and close linked though they were through these days by circumstance, it was a shared sorrow and love of another, not joy and mutual love, that drew Ruth and Ives into present harmony.

Avisa saw each of those who had entered into her life, and took farewell of many humble men and women. The folk departed from her with tears, and the strain became intolerable.

She faded slowly. Then the end seemed at hand, and Lizzie wrote to her husband in secret and implored him to come down again, if only for a few days. He obliged her and arrived to stop from Saturday until Monday.

Ives received him ungraciously, and his coming precipitated some of the frenzy that had slowly gathered head in the younger man's spirit. They sat in the kitchen and Lizzie made tea for her husband, while Arthur described his journey with much worthless detail. Then the schoolmaster turned to Ives and endeavoured to console him.

"Lizzie tells me that your dear mother suffers but little. That is a great blessing, Ives, though of course extreme weakness is in itself a form of suffering. However . . ."

"You needn't tell me. I know everything about her—far more than anybody else. She's all right; she's coming to her own, and 'twill soon tax her God to think of things good enough for her."

"A good and pious woman, and a noble mother for you to remember, my dear fellow."

Ives pursued his own thoughts aloud. There was great anguish in his eyes as he spoke to Lizzie.

"'Tis all one to the lamp when it goes out—but them that be left — the darkness. . . . But us—us that walked by the light of her—and must go blind evermore. . . . 'Tis us that be struck to death—not her. Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie, and me a bad son—a bad son I've been to her. That's the heart of this trouble for me. That precious mother to have such dross for a son!"

"Don't think so, dear Ives. She's been proud of you all your life, and she often tells over the good things you've done for love of her and—and —the good things you be going to do."

"Her work's done," he said. "Her wonderful, beautiful deeds be all ended now, and she've led a better life than any born woman did afore.

She've done with being alive. 'Twas good for the earth, her being alive. The whole world's better for it. But us poor helpless, useless things —what's going to hap to us now?"

He went out from them after asking the question, and his sister wept, but not all for grief.

"My heart aches for him, and yet, and yet 'tis well he should be struck so hard," she sobbed.

"I hope so, Lizzie. Indeed, I think so too. These are healthy signs, and I suppose we must not mind that in his misery he confuses other people with himself, and tries to make us all share in his weakness and past wrong-doing. We are not helpless, useless things, thank God, whatever he may have been. Perhaps, if he is spared, Ives will live to see that I . . . However, this dismay on his part is a sign of grace certainly, and I forgive him for being illogical in his grief. If he would like to stop with us presently, to enjoy our society and see your new home, I shall have no objection."

"You are so wonderfully patient with dear Ives," she said.

Avisa sank slowly into unconsciousness, and her mind, withdrawn from the present, wandered alone through the shadowy avenues of the past. There now she dwelt, and, by the windows of words, those who watched her gained glimpses of her maiden days, her love time, her motherhood, and the hours of her bereavement. Once there sat with her Ruth and Ives, and her son fancied, from a smile that woke upon her face, that she knew him; but it was not so. She tightened her hand on his, no more.

As usual now, she spoke at intervals, but did not know that she spoke.

"Bear up, father," she said. "Our poor baby be happy as a songbird now, and heaven her school instead of earth. She'll know—she'll know and count the days till her mother and father come to her. Us'll meet her up-along. Heaven be very home by earth. Us do live close—close to them we love—maybe closer to the dead ones than the living if faith's strong enough."

Presently she laughed, and her joy was terrible to them.

"Look, father, there comes the boy! So sturdy and strong he goeth on his legs! Do 'e see his little flea-coloured coat, as I've made out of that old blanket? 'Twill do bravely when he walks to day-school in winter. . . . Lizzie's your own darter, father; and the boy's mine—mine."

She laughed again.

"What a jakes of a mess they'm both in, poor dear li'l pigs! Palstring through the mud they've been. . . ."

Her hands worked at the bed-clothes and creased and creased tirelessly.

Jane Pomeroy entered a moment later.

"And well she might think so. Look! Look!" she said. "Do 'e mark the pattern her hands have pinched in the counterpane? That's the fold of the dying—she's at her end."

Twelve hours later the men were called at earliest day, and hastened up to find a reluctant winter dawn struggling with the candle light.

She was conscious now but dumb, and she desired in vain to speak with Ives. For a full hour he knelt beside his mother with his right arm gripped round her. Those of her household were also about her, but she and the man were

only conscious each of the other's presence. People came and went, wept and watched. Then, when one might say that day had broken, Avisa relaxed suddenly upon her son's shoulder, turned her face to him, and so sank to everlasting silence with his lips upon her cheek.

Long he sustained her and would not yield her up, because to him it seemed that the clay in his arms held some faint fragrance still of his mother's vanished soul.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PROBLEM

A MAN'S INHERITANCE may be roughly appraised under three heads: his prehistoric heredity; his parentage; and the environment into which chance throws him. To the first belong those common qualities transmitted to all men, and, concerning Ives Pomeroy, it remained to be seen whether this anterior heritage was the 'corpse in the cargo' destined to foul all and bring his life's history to ruin. Against it might be set the blood in his veins and the companionship of his mother, who for eight-and-twenty years had been the ægis of his existence and the moral stimulant of his environment. Whether her part in him would conquer and subdue that primal endowment unthinking persons charged upon Ives himself remained to be seen.

The time had come when a single-handed life's struggle must seriously begin; and those who knew him best regarded his future with the least hope. Peter Toop voiced general opinion in a phrase: "Only his mother's ghost will ever keep that man straight," he said.

But it was a deeper saying than he knew or those guessed who heard it.

Pomeroy's neighbours gravely doubted for him; his mother herself had died without doubt. In his heart sometimes shone a steadfast beacon, that she had trusted him. He remembered the failing tones of her voice and the flicker of strength that came into them when she spoke of his future.

But man is not like a chain—only as strong as his weakest point. The lines of his least resistance will sometimes be strangely and unexpectedly barred; the bulwarks of his greatest strength will sometimes perish of a secret rot. There is no absolute certainty or stability in character. Our greatness and our littleness are welded together, and a leaven unsuspected may develop at any age before the climacteric to sweeten or vitiate the whole. Out of pettiness may spring our salvation; out of greatness our ruin shall often be traced. And again, our greatness may save us, since the lightning does not strike all who challenge it; or some evil constituent suddenly generated in the crucible of life may destroy us and prove the fatal poison. Men have indeed risen from the dust to higher things, when the transmitted seed has found place, season, and climate to germinate and thrive; but they have descended from higher things as often, because a seed of another sort has suddenly found an inner dung-heap hot and ready wherein to flourish and bring forth. It is never too late to mend or to mar, so long as man is virile and his physical and mental life are healthy and open to impression. Thus the environment is as vital as the inherited instinct, if not more so, and it must serve mightily to promote or retard both the precious and the worthless germs stored within all hearts. Yet,

since human environment is daily bettered, the spirit of the hour may well be one of hope. No State has so far learned to live for the unborn; but Nature invariably pursues this plan, and men cannot ruin the future of humanity. We shall be saved from ourselves by the Law.

Ives Pomeroy belonged to the order of fighters, and he manifested an acute and ill-regulated sense of justice, born of instinct rather than intelligence. Avisa had built her hopes upon it and upon her knowledge of her own young self; but whether now the man's future would breed new stuff of the soul to dull the better part in him or brighten it none could know. All foretold catastrophe, and watched him with unhopeful eyes as he still stood in spirit on the brink of his mother's grave.

The problem was simple and easily stated. What, first, would be the lessening power of Avisa's self from the pit, as time performed its inevitable work of attrition upon memory? And what, in the second place, would be the increasing power of her motherhood in his head and heart during the process of his mental development and general growth? Lastly, how would the lot in life to which chance called him affect the situation?

As man does not inherit disease, but the constitution, or diathesis, favourable or inimical to it, so we may not affirm that good or evil possibilities are transmitted save potentially. They depend for their sequel on circumstances often beyond human power to gauge. Good or evil alike abort or miscarry; and to sow the wind is not with certainty to reap the whirlwind. Environment, to the nurture of character, is what food may

be to a plant: it cannot alter intrinsic attributes, but it can develop or dwarf, incite or restrain.

Ives Pomeroy went through his mother's papers and found among them not a few evidences of her thought for the future. Everything was in order; she left all power to her son, and the knowledge that she had done so rejoiced him, because it spoke of her large trust. Among certain annuities was one for Emmanuel Codd when he finally thought proper to stop work; but the amount had been left for Ives to determine, and while Emmanuel took a black view of this circumstance, his master rejoiced at it.

"She understood me," he said. "You're safe enough in my hands. You're not going yet awhile."

But Emmanuel had no intention to stop. There were changes in the air and, like the rest of the household, he found Vixen Tor Farm a naked and twilit place now that the mother's sun had set. Ruth Rendle for the present went back to her cousins, and Peter was very glad to receive her, and Joel was not. A servant had to be engaged at the farm, and, for the rest, old Mrs. Pomeroy surprised everybody by a great access of energy. She strove with much courage to take the place of her daughter-in-law; and she pleased herself, but nobody else. Ives openly deplored this sudden display of energy and begged his grandmother to be more restful; while she grew excited at her own rejuvenescence and insisted on controlling the inner life and order of the farm.

Lizzie stopped with her brother for the time that Arthur Brown had promised. Then she

returned home and spoke hopefully of Ives and his altered attitude to life. She declared that he had become more solemn and more thoughtful. He was much alone; he was easier to manage; his grief had aged him; but he was quite helpless in many particulars.

"Does he allude in his conversation to Miss Rendle?" Arthur asked.

"No; she went, and he said 'good-bye' before me, as though it was nothing. All the same, he saw her again the next day and took dear mother's beautiful inlaid desk for a keepsake."

Mr. Brown was gently annoyed.

"You ought to have had that."

"It was left in the will for Ruth."

"Then, of course, I say nothing; still . . ."

"Dear mother left me her watch and chain and —the money."

"Far be it from me to criticise the dead, Lizzie. You will remember that when I heard what we—well, I said nothing."

"You were disappointed."

"I may have been; but all was just—from a woman's point of view. Justice is a condition of the mind very rarely to be met with in the female sex. We were talking about your brother. There is no doubt that Mrs. Pomeroy much wished to arrange a match between Ives and Miss Rendle. But with a man of the stamp of Ives, nothing ever happens but the unexpected."

"He was very grateful to her. He once told me that if I had as much brains in my head as Ruth had in her little finger it would be a blessing. But that was before mother died. He's soft and kind now. I think if you was to ask him . . ."

"If I *were* to ask him, Lizzie."

"I think he'd come to us for Christmas, Arthur."

"We will see, my dear; we will see. The rites of hospitality . . ."

He proceeded, but her thoughts were with her brother, and Arthur was presently irritated to perceive that his wife had heard nothing concerning the rites of hospitality. She pictured Ives all day long and her heart ached for him. She prayed to God to send him to Ruth, and she hoped, when his rare letters reached her, that they might contain the news of his engagement.

Indeed, the man was thinking about Ruth and living over the last days of his mother's life with her. As he retraced them, he perceived how large a part of the time Ruth had filled, and accurately guessed at her loyal labours and unceasing devotion of days and nights dedicated to the loved and fading presence. His heart warmed to her often, but he had in it no abiding place for love of woman at this moment. His mother's death grew daily into a thing more desolate and terrible. It submerged him abruptly at all times and in all places; it drowned his soul suddenly, like a seventh wave. Then he would battle up again and go on living and labouring; he would forget altogether sometimes for an hour or so, when nature loosed her grip on memory and gave a respite. And then, if an incident, or a word, or a phrase brought it all back, he would curse himself for letting his grief slip for a moment. By night dreams revived her bodily shape until he woke and his arms seemed to lift to her; chance words also served to paint her picture so cruelly, so brightly, that the world was but a black curtain stretched behind.

He fought the bitter fight that all large hearts have fought, and he came very slowly to a rational survey of his future and its duties. For a time he planned to leave Vixen Tor; then he decided not to do so. He knew no other world than this, and felt no immediate heart or hunger to seek one.

A month after Avisa's death old Mrs. Bolt came to see Jane Pomeroy, and she brought with her an item of news.

"If Peter Toop haven't overmastered that girl Ruth and got her to go back in the bar!"

"I wish to God she'd come back here," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"The lady they'd got didn't suit 'em, so it all fitted in very suent and comfortable. And now that chap, Matthew Northmore, may win her yet. He's been after her these years and years, so Samuel's wife tells me."

"I wish 'twas our Ives was going to take her. Avisa told me once 'twould be, and that God had treated her like Moses and let her get a glimpse of the Promised Land—meaning Ives married to that maiden."

Mrs. Bolt sighed.

"'Tis a wisht house without her. We ancient creatures be left lagging, Jane, and the useful ones are took. 'Tis a strange way of Providence to leave us, that none wants, and . . ."

But the other old woman interrupted sharply:

"Speak for yourself!" she said. "I ban't left lagging that I know about. I'm so busy and useful an old woman as you'll find in the kingdom; and my grandson could no more do without me than your boy could without you."

CHAPTER XXX

MR. CODD RECEIVES NOTICE

NIGHT HID THE LAND as Pomeroy returned home from Tavistock. A single lamp burned at the cross roads known as Moor Shop; and above it hung the stars. The man turned now into unfamiliar paths of reflection. He did not follow them far, for abstract thought was largely foreign to his bent; but a wider outlook dawned from experience, and at fitful seasons, as now, when alone and cut off from the world by the accident of night, he used his brains and dimly glimpsed at hidden things and analogies; at unsuspected wrongs within him and without him; at the ways of the world and the profound uncertainty of human affairs. His mother's death had aged him and advanced her life's work in his heart. He believed in the religious dogmas that she had most steadfastly held, and they quickened for a short season upon her passing; then they abated their force, and they were hibernating through the winter of his grief. Church-going wearied him for the moment. He seldom went nearer the porch than his mother's grave; and there he stopped and listened to the Sunday service humming from within and set every grass-blade in its place above the dust of her.

Ives looked at the little oil lamp and he looked at a bright star that flashed aloft above the distant shoulders of Dartmoor. The higher light marked his way; at the lesser a moth wheeled and worshipped after her manner. And the man, with his mind for a moment empty, considered the case and perceived how a lamp might be a world for one earth-born wanderer, and a world might be a lamp for another. He pitied the moth and he pitied himself more: because his lamp was out and he went in darkness. The stars were cold. He was trying to do his duty with a lively hope that his mother knew it; but life rolled dull and deadly. The soft moth tapped at the lamp and flashed hither and thither a while; then it vanished. Ives went on his way, hesitated about returning home immediately, and instead kept to the main road and presently descended into Merivale. He had been alone nearly all day and the mood was on him to see men.

He made fast his horse presently and entered the Jolly Huntsmen.

A man had preceded him by half a minute, and Moleskin was speaking to Mr. Peter Toop as Ives appeared.

"Just a hair of the dog that bit me, my dear. I was bosky-eyed last night up to Princetown, or, to put it honestly, a little drunk. All over an argument about a married woman! Of course I took her side, and I proved my case and showed she was as good as gold. But it took a power of words and made me uncommon thirsty."

Mr. Cawker was supplied, and Ives accosted his old friend.

"What's this about a threat to turn you out of your house?" he said.

"To be frank, it's true. As you know, I've stuck very close to the church now for pretty near on two years, and I've given work a fair chance and turned my hand to twenty honest trades; but for some high reason hidden from human eyes, matters have fallen out criss-cross, and I can't deny it."

"Something will have to be done."

"So it will. Don't you suppose I'm not putting my mind to it. I've gived parson a last chance to mend the job and do his duty. If he fails me, 'tis the church that fails me. I shall be very sorry to leave it; but with a wife and darter depending on my usefulness . . ."

"How you do deceive yourself!" cried Emmanuel Codd from his corner. "All the same," he added, "I'm not blaming you. I've got a crow to pick with the Establishment myself, as all know. With my lifelong religion I ban't in any better case than you, as took it up at a whim and seem like to drop it again."

"What's the matter with you?" asked Peter; "we've always reckoned you to be one of the lucky ones, Codd. Good work and good wages for over half a century, and good health and no relations—what more can a man expect from Providence?"

"As to good work—yes," said Mr. Codd. "Plenty of work; and the more I do, the more I may do. A willing horse I've been all my life, and driven accordingly. But when you speak of good wages . . ."

He looked straight at his master, and Ives was quite ready for the challenge. There had been half a dozen minor disturbances since the death of Mrs. Pomeroy, but her son, mindful of her

methods, had exercised an unusual patience. To-night he felt not patient, and, since others heard the indictment, he turned to Codd:

"Well, go on. What about wages?"

"Every man in this here bar knows what I get, I believe. You've always had money, and tons of it, Ives Pomeroy, so you can't tell what it is to be grey-headed and yet only scrape a few shillings a week like what I do. You can't live with money like you can with man, equal and friendly. It bosses you, or else you boss it. And it's bossed you more and more since your mother died. You're greedy of it, or you'd double my wages."

Moleskin spoke.

"You're a liar, Codd," he said. "This young man, whatever else he may be, don't care for money more than any other dirt. The half-crowns . . ."

"Shut up, Cawker," interrupted Ives. "Don't come between me and this fool. He's been courting trouble ever since my mother went, and now, by God, he shall have it. Look here"—and he turned to Codd—"when you gave notice a month agone and I treated you same as my mother would have done and took no heed, what did you do?"

"I stopped on, out of respect to her memory, that's what I did."

"You went poking round to every farm this side of Tavistock to see who'd take you on. And you found not two that wanted you and not one—*not one*—who'd give you the wages I do."

Mr. Codd looked as angry as an old man can.

"You hound!" he said, "you've been spying upon me, and hearing lies or inventing 'em.

Work, indeed! 'Tis a damn disgrace to you as I should be expected to work at my age. Any other master would pension me off with full wages, as your mother meant to do, and told me so with her own lips."

"Then why for did she leave your pension for me to decide?"

"Be that as 'twill, I give notice," answered Emmanuel. "Here, afore these men, for the last time, I give notice and won't call it back."

"No, you won't call it back," answered the other, who was quite as wrathful as Codd. "You'll go to-morrow, and you and your box will be outside my gate afore noon. You crooked-minded, evil old snake, you've done for yourself now! *Take* notice—that's what you've got to do."

"Find a better man, that's all," said the veteran.

"And that's what I shall do. There's better'n you on every hedge."

Peter here intervened.

"You're taking up too much of the conversation, if I may say so," he remarked; "and I'm sure, Ives, you know your manners too well to wash dirty linen in public like this."

"And I'll take his job, if you please," said a thin labourer in the corner. "I didn't catch what money he gets exactly; but no doubt 'tis a good few shillings better'n mine."

"You shut your mouth, mate," answered Moleskin. "You're a foreigner in these parts, and Mr. Pomeroy wants a man with known character and qualifications. I'm the lad for his money!"

Ives laughed.

"No, no, my old night-hawk, I don't want you

working for me no more. What you call work, I call play. You spend all your time working hard to escape hard work—that's what you do."

Mr. Codd had departed, and Pomeroy, under the genial influence of the inn, soon recovered his temper. He rather enjoyed the respect paid to him as a man of some means. He found himself with three hundred a year from money saved by his immediate ancestors, and he believed that Vixen Tor Farm might be made to yield more than was at present the case. Finally to have done with Codd was a relief to his mind, and those present were very ready to approve his definite action.

He soon returned to his horse and overtook Mr. Codd on the way home. He was passing without further speech when Emmanuel spoke.

"Since I'm going after light to-morrow, I'll thank you to name my annuity. And I tell you, man to man, to be honest. Your mother and your father have gone, and I be left at your mercy. What be you going to allow me for my natural life, that's what I ax you?"

"I'd give you the price of a rope if you'd promise to hang yourself."

"That would be to meet you t'other side the grave, and I've no wish to do it. I call on you for my lawful rights, and that's all."

"You can have more than that. You've no lawful rights, and if I let you go in the workhouse none could blame me. I'll give you half-a-crown a week while you live—for my mother's sake."

"You wicked rogue!" burst out the old man, "you damned robber! Enough to make your mother's bones . . ."

The younger roared him down.

"Leave my mother alone! You to mangle her name on your poisonous tongue! My mother never knew the man you were, or she'd have turned you adrift twenty years ago. And don't you come in my sight again, or, old as you are, I'll skin you with my horsewhip. You've tormented my life ever since I could walk, and I'm thankful to be rid of you; and half-a-crown a week is half-a-crown a week more than you're worth, and money ill spent."

"And you, pretending as you cared for your poor mother and laughing at her wishes the moment she'm in the ground."

For answer Ives struck at the other with all his might, but it was dark and Codd stood out of range. The whip hissed through the air, and Emmanuel hastened from the footpath and crouched behind a furze-bush.

"Don't you see my face again," cried Ives; then he went on his way, and not until he had returned home, stabled his horse and entered the house, did the old man creep back and get up silently to his attic.

Pomeroy found his grandmother asleep by the fire and wakened her. He did not perceive her weariness, and began a long and furious tirade against the world in general and the monstrous things that happened in it.

He mentioned a case of cruel injustice at Tavistock; he swore at Arthur Brown, who had lately sent him some pamphlets upon the subject of chemical manures; he blamed Matthew Northmore because the farmer had refused to oblige him in the matter of a sale; he cried out that the world was a hotbed of gross injustice.

"Look where you will, you see the poor bullied by the rich, the weak ill-treated by the strong. It's a damned world, grandmother, and nobody be doing anything to make it better."

The ancient woman yawned and looked to the door.

"'Tis all in Higher Hands than ours," she said.

"Why don't the Higher Hands do something, then? If God's a just God, why should these things happen?"

"Us'll know some day, Ives."

"Perhaps we shall; but that don't better it. Is it right for wrong things to happen? That's the big question. If we ban't allowed to do wrong, why can God Almighty?"

And up aloft Mr. Codd, out of the bitterness of a wounded and outraged heart, also arraigned his God on the subject of the annuity and this sequel to fifty years' hard work. He put his Sunday clothes into a wooden box that was covered with a spare piece of old wall-paper. The box was not large, but he owned hardly enough to fill it. There remained ample room for the old beaver hat that he wore on Sundays.

"If I ban't upsides again with that anointed scamp afore he'm a year older, may the Dowl forgive me!" he said to himself while he packed. "If I can't do it no other way, I'll burn his ricks come autumn. And damn his mother too! No saint, after all—just like all the rest of human creatures. She knowed well enough he'd do something like this."

At earliest dawn Mr. Codd took his box on his back and left Vixen Tor without ceremony. He

went to the Jolly Huntsmen and had breakfast there; then he looked about to hire a room and seek employment. The room he quickly secured in the house of a quarryman; but to find work was not so easy. But he had saved money as everybody knew.

CHAPTER XXXI

NORTHMORE AND POMEROY

PARENTAL SYMPATHY has been shown the matrix and starting point of all love; and as the coral insect, building under the darkness of great waters with steadfast instinct, reaches into the light at last, to make a home for fair creatures with wings and fronds, so sympathy for offspring, working blindly in the fish and fowl, in the great ape and vanished being whose eyes first glowed with conscious intelligence, has fought upwards and brought man to the moral altitude where now he stands. His zenith is not yet, but the rational spirit looks forward, and hope grows justified when the dark history of the past is contrasted with the brighter story of to-day and the noble prophecy of to-morrow.

Ives Pomeroy had been endowed with such a wealth of parental sympathy as falls to the lot of few men, and the effect of this treasure became manifest in his relations with other people. He grew somewhat more considerate; he showed more reserve in his attitude to women generally. His mother's memory raised his respect for her sex, and his chief interest began to be permanent marriage. His increasing sense served as a mirror wherein outlines, formerly indistinct, at last dis-

played their true contours. When Ruth left the Vixen he missed her presence; but such a minor deprivation was merely felt as a shadow swallowed by the greater eclipse of his mother's death. Her individuality, though slight beside Avisa's, was strong for so young a woman, and to Pomeroy, himself young, Ruth did not seem a slight presence. To a child another child appears to have plenty of character. Now Ives thought upon her, and her virtues grew considerable to him in the light of his own ripening understanding. He began to respect her more distinguished attributes.

Lastly, Ives never forgot what his mother thought of Ruth, and what his mother once had hoped with respect to her and him. The man's interest matured slowly; then an event served to quicken it. As he became more occupied with the affairs of Ruth Rendle's life, he grew to understand that much was hidden from him, and he set to work to find the truth of the matters concealed. She was not a happy woman, and he did not know the reason. In course of time he came approximately to see it and guessed that Matthew Northmore was in some measure responsible for Ruth's darkness. He watched, and he noted not seldom in the bar of the Jolly Huntsmen that Matthew's advent checked the girl's spirits and reduced her to uneasiness. She was deferential and apologetic to Northmore, as though she owed him something. She suggested one who went under an obligation. Ives soon convinced himself that Ruth suffered persecution, and that Northmore continued to shadow her life.

Doubt turned to certainty when Ruth finally left Merivale and took a situation in a pastrycook's

shop at Tavistock. He tried hard on one occasion to make her confess that she had fled from Northmore, but she would not. She parried his attack until she annoyed him.

"There were more reasons than one for my going," she said steadfastly; "but they are personal. I'm better here, Ives. Mrs. Foster is kindness itself; the work's interesting to me, and I shall do well, though 'tis a slow, heavy air after the Moor."

He left her, and a day later, while still much concerned at Ruth's departure, Ives met Northmore beside the river. It was an encounter unfortunate in every respect, for here clashed two men who were moved by mutual secret resentment, and who both believed that the other was responsible for a personal disaster. To Northmore Ruth's departure meant tragedy, and he blamed Pomeroy for it; while from the standpoint of Ives, Matthew and only Matthew had caused the girl to depart. It was a bad day in the heart and temper of both.

Northmore was passing Ives with an inarticulate grunt of recognition. They had hardly spoken, save on business, since Mrs. Pomeroy's death until the present, but now Ives, in the vein to quarrel and much impressed with the justice of his cause, struck out into speech much as another man might have struck out into blows. He hungered to have a passage at arms. His blood cried for it; and swiftly he got more than he bargained for.

"D'you know what you've done?" he began violently. "But I suppose you do, if you're not blind. I mean Ruth—why the hell couldn't you let her alone? Always after her in season and out,

though you must have seen that you was troubling her cruel. Why, cheerful though she might be in the bar, and merry even, for her, the minute you came in with your fiddle face she'd shrink up and her mouth would go tight and her eyes would go sorrowful, and she'd look at you out of the corners of 'em, as girls can without moving their heads an inch. Frightened her—that's what you did; and now you've frightened her away altogether, and be damned to you!"

Northmore gasped before this terrific attack; then he answered:

"Same as ever, I see. A bad day for you when your mother died, Pomeroy. She stood between you and many a well-deserved thrashing."

"D'you think I don't know 'twas a bad day for me when my mother died? If I don't know it, who should? You can leave that; and the man who'd like to thrash me is quite welcome to try—you with the rest. You've ruined the girl's life with offering yourself to her when she don't want you; and if you were a decent man, instead of a selfish coward, you'd have kept away from her and let her bide in peace."

"You—you, who know less about her than anybody living—you who never cared for any mortal thing but your own self and your own evil passions and amusements! Why, damn you, how do you dare to stop me and lecture me? Is the girl your business? Did you ever give a thought to her? Do you know what she is? She's an angel from heaven, too good to breathe the same air with such as you. And yet she did, and was under the same roof with you, and yet you couldn't see . . . But of course you couldn't—a vicious blackguard like you. How should a

mind like yours understand the wonder of a woman like that?"

"Of course nobody but Matthew Northmore knows the good points in a woman. Such a clever chap at 'em as him! Poor girl—no, I don't know how good she is. No man knows how good a woman can be. But I know she's got enough sense to give you a wide berth, and I hope you'll take the hint and keep away from her. And you'd better! She's got no chap to look after her and so I mean to—for my mother's sake."

Northmore, long convinced that Pomeroy had no scrap of affection for Ruth, was struck to absolute dumbness by this statement. The irony of it crushed him. Here was he ready to fight and shed every drop of his blood for the woman he worshipped, while this man, who cared not a jot for Ruth, now proposed to play the part of her protector.

He stood silent, then burst into rage.

"What have I to do with you, you worthless straw? And what has she to do with you? I wish to God she understood the truth of you, as she knows the truth of me—then . . . That girl's a million times more to me than ever she was or could be to your mother; and her good is more to me than my own, or any good on earth. Therefore you keep from her also! Herd with your kind; go on with your own useless life and let her see the sort of man she puts before . . ."

He broke off, sensible even in his rage that he was saying too much. He stopped, choked down the torrent of words at his lips, and went his way, while Ives stood and stared after him. He apprehended something of the possible meaning in these last syllables, and he cried out no last

word. He stood still; his physical and mental heat both cooled; then he proceeded about his business.

The men were destined to meet once more before the day was done. They elbowed by chance at the inn after nightfall, and the smouldering fires burst forth again at another point. They wrangled concerning a third party, at present under arrest for the alleged theft of a pony, and Northmore spoke to Peter Toop.

"I've had my suspicions of that man a good long time. In fact, I told one or two to keep their eye on him."

"Your way," suddenly retorted Ives, who smarted for a further thrust—"your way to suspect evil and then tell it where 'twill hurt a man most."

"You mustn't be rude, Pomeroy," said Mr. Toop.

"Why don't you check that man, then? What's he saying but hard things against one who may be innocent? 'Twas him, Northmore there, who got me put away back-along. I haven't forgot!"

"You pitiful liar!" cried the other. "All men know that's as far from truth as can be. Yet, to make a case against me, you bring it up now. Clink! And where do the likes of you deserve to be—raving and ranting and bringing a whole district down into the dirt."

"If I get clink again, 'twill be for you, then," shouted Ives in a rage. "You're a evil-thinking wretch, to goad a man this way. Because a decent girl couldn't stand your slimy love-making . . ."

"Drop that, or I'll break your head in!" cried the other. He seized an empty pewter and lifted

his arm to fling. Ives dashed forward, and in a moment the men were rolling on the floor.

No immediate harm came of this meeting, however, for others were in the bar and Ives was pulled off Northmore by the scruff of the neck. He rose, cleaned himself, and uttered deliberate threats.

"You'll rue this day, farmer, as long as you live; and let those who hear me, hear me. I've got to be even with you for this, and I will be. You wait and see—you that torment women and set the police on men! I'd have forgot it years and years agone, and I did let it go for my mother's sake. But now you've brought it back yourself and you shall be paid in full, God's my Judge!"

He went out, and a few minutes later Codd came in and heard sympathy being extended to Northmore. The incident was related to him, and, since the wrong-doings of Ives happened to be Emmanuel's favourite topic, he related much that he knew, invented much else, and coloured all.

"As for me, I be cast out with a pittance," he concluded; "and well the villain knows that I must starve or go in the union if no man will come forward and give me work."

"He's sworn openly to do me a harm," answered Northmore, "so now I know where I stand. He's no better than a mad dog and deserves to be treated the same."

The conversation changed, while Northmore drank deep for him, and delayed to leave the bar.

Meanwhile Ives cooled as he returned to Vixen Tor. To-day he had reached a high-water mark of folly and impatience, and, alone in the night, he perceived what he had done. By an effort he

strove to look at this matter with other eyes than his own. He judged what it must be for the master of Stone Park to love and not be loved. He felt that Northmore's stubborn persistence was to his credit. Moreover, in his heat the other had shown a little of the truth. It appeared that Northmore knew a secret. Was it possible that Ruth Rendle . . .? It did not surprise him as much as it might have surprised some men. He attracted women, and, since adolescence, he always had done so. They fascinated him and they knew it; and the reward was their goodwill and interest. He grew amiable and happy. He regretted that he had made a fool of himself, but attached no particular importance to the incident, for he had done the like so often.

Presently he thought upon his mother and became mild and gracious and sane before he slept. He determined to see Northmore and apologise. The whole incident, in the light of a restored tranquillity, became mean and insignificant. He doubted not that the other man would view it similarly after sleeping on it. But he forgot the point of view.

CHAPTER XXXII

MOLESKIN ON HIMSELF

MR. CAWKER was in a genial, expansive, and egoistical mood at the bar of the Jolly Huntsmen. He preached his gospel and drank meantime, now with this admirer, now with that.

"A man's a fool to do any work he doesn't enjoy doing," he declared; "but only let him enjoy it and then 'tisn't work at all, but play. In my opinion we was all put here to play, not to work. We'm all the Lord's children, and don't a parent like to see his little ones having a romp?"

"'Tis your grandfather's lazy gipsy blood in you," said Mr. Toop.

"It may be, Joel. I won't say it isn't; but it's solid wisdom. Look at the high old life he led! Then they took the fine fellow, and shut him up, and broke his gallant heart. The Lord meant us to enjoy ourselves; 'twas His Almighty plan. Let the beasts that perish work! We've got something better to do, I believe."

"Many of us can be happy and contented and still work, Mr. Cawker," argued Samuel Bolt, who was of the company; "why, there's men enjoy mending roads and tacking hedges and ploughing fields."

"Let 'em, then, Sammy. If that work makes

'em happy, then it's play and not work. Only my taste is different. But unfortunately the things I like best, such as drinking and smoking, and talking to all you clever chaps, and looking at the clouds running over the sky, and so on—well, there's no money to 'em."

"A man ought to be useful before everything," declared Rupert Johnson. He handed his future father-in-law another glass of liquor as he spoke.

"Then be useful, Rupert, if you feel called to it. Do what your nature craves for. The Lord who made you knows best. My experience is that the pleasantest companions ban't the useful men. They're apt to be puffed up with the work they do, and give themselves the credit instead of their Maker. There's no credit in doing what you love to do. In my case I've got to work, but, seeing his reverence have now finally thrown me over—God forgive him—I'll do the work I like best, and combine business with pleasure so long as I can crawl about."

"You'll go back to poaching, in plain words," said Joel.

"I won't work. 'Tis only playing the hypocrite, and I should feel ashamed to meet the Lord come presently if I wasted any more of my time working."

"You'll meet somebody else more like," said Mr. Toop.

"Not me. I'm all right; but I shan't go to glory through the church door. I be going to be myself from this day forward."

"The likes of you, Mr. Cawker, did ought to get away from themselves," ventured Samuel Bolt.

"Can't be done, Sammy," answered Moleskin.

"A tame canary's quite right to twitter; it's made so. You go on driving the steam-roller and playing hymns on your penny whistle, my son. That's your joy and duty, and you do both very nice. Only don't ax everybody to do the same."

"It's all very well," said Peter Toop; "but if every man was to do what is right in his own eyes, what becomes of the State and the Church, and God Almighty too for that matter? We're born miserable sinners and . . ."

"Not at all, Peter. We're born babbies. We're born so innocent and blameless as every kitten and puppy that comes squeaking into a hard world. I'm not a miserable sinner, and I'm tired of yelping out that I am. 'Tis only to cry stinking fish afore the Throne of Grace, and I'll never do it no more. A bad compliment to my Maker, and terrible poor-spirited also."

Mr. Cawker drank and smoked and listened to various arguments against his opinion.

"When I'm sober," he said, "I like to talk about sport and women, and when I'm drunk I turn to religion. And that brings me round to women again, because God's always on their side, as every married man knows."

"You've had a good one," said Rupert Johnson. "I'm sure your poor lady be a wonder of sense and patience."

"When you speak of Mrs. Cawker in a mixed company, you go too far, Rupert," answered Moleskin. "Mrs. Cawker hasn't been a woman for the last five-and-twenty years. My wife was all I could wish till her barrow-load of infirmities overtook her; then she sank to be what now she is, and 'tis nought but her brave soul and my care that keeps the spark in her ill-treated frame."

"There's justice in Heaven, Moleskin," said Peter stoutly. "Justice is the corner-stone there, and so be sure your wife will have all the joys it has not entered mind of man to conceive."

"She ought to—and a bit over," answered Mr. Cawker. "Her life has been one sleepless ache for nearly a quarter of a century, and she've borne it so brave as a regiment of soldiers. And I'll say this also. As a poor human man married to a bedridden ruin, I've suffered too. I may have looked round for consolation in a quiet way and not spurned the kindly hearts that rose up here and there by God's good grace. Because 'tis well known He don't forget a sparrow, much less an immortal soul with manly instincts."

"You overlook the recording angel as easy as you overlook your score in this bar," said Mr. Joel Toop.

"Not a bit of it," answered the poacher. "He is an angel—that's the main thing about the chap with the Books—and he's got the large experience of an angel. Lord love you, Joel, after all he have had to set down against the account of the world, my little lot won't look bigger than a grain of sand on the shore! A few birds with uncertain owners, and a few salmon as belonged to nobody in particular, and a few jokes against my betters, including my Maker. What is it? Mere schoolboy naughtiness put against the big sinners. And won't that angel know it? Bless your life, he'll think no more of my page than you do of the money in your till on a quiet day. Take big ideas if you want to see yourself as Heaven sees you. Be sure God Almighty thinks a lot better of us than we've any idea."

"To hear a human worm on such good terms

with his hereafter is a caution," cried Joel Toop; "and I hope none of you young men in this bar will give another thought to him."

"I hope you all will," said Moleskin. "If you don't grasp the difference between big and little now, you never will. And then you'll go through the world with silly fancies and be a terror to your neighbours for ever. Suppose I was to come out on the wrong side and be booked for the bad place, what can they do then to the Stonehouse murderer, that swung last week at Exeter for poisoning three women? What becomes of him, or of that beauty, Saul Ash, that stole his wife's mother's money, then knocked her on the head and burned down her cottage!"

"Hell's hotter in one place than in another, belike," hazarded Samuel; and Joel Toop applauded the ingenious theory.

Moleskin's eyes were rolling, but he pulled himself together, emptied his last glass and made an end.

"Fire be fire, and hell fire lasts for eternity; and I haven't earned it; and I shan't get it; and more won't anybody in this bar—not even Joel here. And now I be drunk, so one of you pious blades had better put your charity to use and see me home."

CHAPTER XXXIII

SAMUEL FALLS

RETURNING FROM HIS WORK at Stone Park, where he had found employment, Mr. Codd chanced to meet Jill Bolt also on her way home to Merivale. She knew that he cherished bitter grievance against Pomeroy, who continued to interest her more than any living man.

"Must seem funny to you, being anywhere else than at Vixen Tor," she said; and Mr. Codd admitted it.

"'Tis a mournful barren place after t'other; and Northmore ban't easy; but he's straight and don't change. Very different from that rogue in t'other place."

"Yes, he is a rogue all right."

"He'll swing yet, and I should like to turn him off."

"Words don't break no shins. If a chap had treated me like that chap has treated you, I'd never rest till I'd paid the score."

Emmanuel Codd looked at her.

"Ah," he said, "that's from the heart! I dare say you've got more than we know against him too."

"'Tis not that. He's tried to have his way

with me, but I was too strong for him. Not my sort. All the same he did try, and because he tried I hate the man."

He nodded.

"It shows a very proper, self-respecting spirit in you, and I feel the same. Don't think I've done with the thief. To rob me of my pension—grasping scoundrel! I'll pay him yet, sure as my name's Codd. The people all hate him. No honest man can do with him. My master won't hear his name, and quite right too. He threatened Northmore in the face of the company. But I'll make him smart to his marrow yet."

Jill considered.

"It wants a brave man to stop him," she said.

He looked at her craftily.

"And maybe a cunning woman too—eh?

"A woman can plan and a man can do."

"I'd ruin him to-morrow if 'twas in my power," declared Codd.

"Let him as ruined others be ruined himself. Anyway, I'll help you if you like. I . . ."

The offer was not acknowledged and not renewed, for many things swept between Jill's proposal and Emmanuel's answer. They had reached Merivale and marked a crowd at Samuel's door. The doctor's trap was standing there, and two of Mr. Bolt's fellow-workmen stood and talked to the people. Seeing her, the men pushed forward a woman. It was Mary Cawker, who now, with a white face and trembling tongue, broke the news to Jill.

"Your husband, Mrs. Bolt. I'm cruel sorry to say it. Something on the steam engine busted all of a sudden, and it took charge going down

Tavistock hill, and he couldn't stop it, and it turned over, and he's—he's alive, but scalded cruel and broke his poor leg in the bargain. His mother's along with him and the doctor likewise."

Jill passed quickly and hastened to her husband.

He was unconscious, and the doctor said that if his patient withstood the shock he might recover. The burns were to be feared more than the broken leg. Yet, though Samuel escaped sudden death by a miracle, a kinder fate had slain him instantly, for it was not destined that he should survive. He returned to consciousness in the evening and began to give his mother a detailed account of the catastrophe. His great anxiety was to explain that through no personal fault the thing had happened.

For a week he lived, and then his burns killed him.

Owing to the religious opinions of his doctor, he suffered needless agony for six days. To let any injured beast but man endure half as much would have outraged England.

The harmless fool, Samuel Bolt, endured as much physical torture as his frame could support before Nature extinguished him; and during those days, when the folk stopped their ears as they rushed past the cottage, men and women were kind and strove to do what they might for all the unhappy dwellers in that house. Old Mrs. Bolt's frenzy rendered her useless, and Jill could do nothing but watch the nurses. She never left her husband and never ceased to implore the doctor to hasten his end.

But medical science, with the skill of the Inquisition, fed him and fortified him. The doctor said afterwards that the whole College of

Surgeons could not have kept Samuel Bolt alive an hour longer. He was proud of his pitiful achievement.

A very general sympathy reigned for Rachel Bolt, but little overflowed for the widow. People doubted not that she would soon marry again.

Jill had honestly and terribly felt her husband's sufferings; but not because he was her husband. She was left poor, but she was still young. She found herself free, and her world appeared to be full of men.

Not until Samuel had sunk into the earth did she begin to build castles in the air; and then many possibilities awoke in her mind. Especially Ives Pomeroy occupied her thoughts, and her new attitude to the man appeared when next Emmanuel Codd returned to the old subject.

A fortnight after her husband's death he met her, and began by a general expression of regret at her misfortunes.

"A terrible time for you; but you'll forget all about this after a year or less. The young can forget easier than us old people."

"I shall never forget. I've had my dose of marriage, anyway."

"I saw that man—Ives Pomeroy, I mean—with Ruth Rendle a bit back-along. He's after her now, I do believe. His mother always wanted for him to marry her; but 'twill be doing her a kindness if we can prevent it."

There was a great deal in the mind of Jill that she could not utter to Emmanuel. He waited for her malignity to inspire his malevolence. He was ready to execute what she cared to plan. But the time was still far from ripe.

"It's a thought awkward for me to do any-

thing for the moment, because the man was exceeding kind about Samuel. He called every day, and they great bunches of grapes he sent did comfort Sam's raging thirst without a doubt."

"Grapes! The fool always runned to grapes when anybody was stricken. He bothered his mother's life out of her with grapes at the end."

"I couldn't do anything against him for the minute; I don't feel like it."

"He won't know 'tis you. You've got the same cruel grievance against the rogue as you always have had. But for him you'd never have married Bolt, and had your baby die, and your husband die, and all the rest of the misery that's fallen to your lot. Can't you see as he is responsible for everything?"

"All the same . . ."

Codd sneered.

"I see which way the cat be going to jump. You think he'll come after Samuel's leavings—eh? Not him! He's going to ax Ruth, and she'll say 'yes,' poor fool. Mark me, afore you can look round they'll be tokened. Once he's after a girl, the grass don't grow under his feet. You'll sit and wait for him to come back till your fiery hair be white, but he'll not come."

She looked at Emmanuel without speaking for half a minute. Then she answered slowly:

"You won't anger me, though you try to. I'll tell you more when I know more. It may pay you better to be friends with me than quarrel with me."

"You females!" he exclaimed. "Vanity's the backbone of you all. You think, even after all this, that you'll win him back again, with your eyes on the ground!"

"I wasn't a free woman then. Now 'tis different."

It was Mr. Codd's turn to reflect a while.

"Of course the likes of him do nothing but what you don't expect," he said. "He might turn from Ruth to you again—just because 'tis the last thing on earth a sane man would do."

"He wants a woman, not a pin-tailed girl like that."

"He wants hell," answered Emmanuel; "he's earned it, and it shan't be my fault if he don't get it sooner or late."

"Think a bit and don't make such a row. What would be most use to you, to have the man come round and mend your pension, or to have him—well, to do him an ill turn—burn his ricks or what not?"

"To burn his ricks be a very good thought," declared Codd. "And nobody would be better able to set a light to 'em in the proper place than me."

"But if he was to double your pension—that would be better fun."

"He'll not do that."

"Not single-handed; he might if there was anybody to put it in his head to do it."

"I was a fool to come to you, or any woman."

"You might do worse. I'll see the man, or let him see me. We've been strangers lately along of one thing and another. But now 'tis different. I'll get at his inner thoughts if I can. I'm the sort that treat men as they treat me."

"You'm a hard-hearted, selfish bitch, like all the rest," he said.

Then he went off in great annoyance and disappointment.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BY THE ROADSIDE

ALOFT, upon the head of Cocks Tor, was happening the nuptial flight of ants. Their brief winged time of joy had come, and they whirled in a little black halo above the rocks, and made a crown of life for the land. The sound of these myriads was audible, and it came like the sustained throb of Pan's own pipe heard far away. The music persisted in a wail against the bass of the humble bees and the drone of other insects that threaded the silence of this pinnacle. Now the noise grew as loud as a bird's cry; now it waned to the whisper of rubbing grass blades; and the amazing tornado of ants warped here and there with the breath of the air, or as their countless wills simultaneously dictated.

A woman listened to the wail of the ants and watched them. Jill was resting for a few moments on her way home. She carried a heavy basket, and the sun fires overhead had wearied her. She lolled in a little cup of the heath with her eyes on the footpath winding below; then suddenly, in the direction she would presently take, she saw a man and woman. Interest of the most active sort awoke in her mind, but it was not a pleasant interest. She sat up in her lair and stared.

"What be they doing up here?" she wondered.

They were evidently talking together, and they appeared deeply interested each in the society of the other.

Presently they stopped some quarter-mile below Jill, and sat in the fern and continued their speech. She watched them, herself unseen, and felt that she would give much to know the subject of their conversation.

Ives Pomeroy and Ruth spoke together, and their topic was Matthew Northmore.

"No," she said. "He don't trouble me much now, poor fellow. You mustn't think that. He's a kind-hearted man really, Ives. I wish—I wish he was different."

"He hates me because I dared to tell him the truth. But I despise the mean creature. He's scored off me more than once during the past few years, and he's obstinate and a bit of a brute, specially in the way he's badgered and bullied you. But I'll cry quits some day. I don't forget what I owe him. He's a man that won't be choked off a thing—and more won't I. Certainly he's cruel lucky—money rolls in on him. But money's no use if you can't buy what you want to buy. There's just one thing in the whole world he'd give all his money for; and that's not for sale."

Ives regarded Ruth with the air of possession. It had now come to him as a certainty that she would be his wife. He had reached the point of desiring her and of missing her when days passed and they did not meet. He had not, however, grown to be jealous of the other men, or fearful that she might not love him; but the dawn of that intenser emotion was near. He had heard much

of Ruth lately behind her back, because Lizzie was spending a month at Vixen Tor. Arthur Brown had been away with a Cook's touring party in France, improving his mind; and Lizzie felt very happy at the Vixen in companionship with her own. She told her husband, when he returned to spend a few days at Vixen Tor, that Ives was marvellously improved, and she spoke ceaselessly to Ives of Ruth and of their mother's great ambition concerning her. The subject was agreeable to Ives, but Lizzie felt that his indifference to delay showed him not really lover-like. She chid him and foretold that he would lose Ruth altogether. "She may like you well enough, but she can't wait for ever," Lizzie declared. "There's other men as good and well-to-do see her every day at Tavistock."

This true saying Ives remembered now as he looked at Ruth.

"Have you ever thought how changed I be, Ruth?" he asked.

"No. I don't see you much changed, Ives."

"Not since mother died?"

"No."

"You never tell me the things she used to say about me."

"Can't you guess them? 'Twas only of you we talked. She taught me all—all I know that's worth knowing."

He nodded with his mother's nod, plucked a blade of grass and chewed it.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I must get a wife."

She rose.

"And I must get about my business."

"When do you come back to the Jolly Huntsmen?"

"After ten o'clock. I'm to spend two whole days' holiday there and go back to Tavistock come Monday."

"I'll meet you to-night," he said. "And what about Sunday? You haven't seen as much of Lizzie as she could wish yet. Her wonderful husband's there for the minute too. Will you drink tea along with us?"

"Yes, if she'd like."

"She would like. She's very anxious for you to see the baby again."

"A little beauty 'tis!"

"Can't say. Ban't a judge. But infant though he be, the creature's so like his father as two peas. The same great, pious, brown eyes—stupid as a calf's. He'd begin to lecture me, like Arthur does, if he could talk. He looks at me now as if he knew I was going to the bad place."

"I hope you'll teach him not to be a prig."

"I shan't get the chance. You'll come o' Sunday?"

"Yes, I will, and thank you."

"And I'll make up along the road to-night to see you home. Expect me down to Moor Shop."

"Don't think of coming so far as that."

"'Twill be a pleasure to me to do it," he said.

She departed, and Ives began to plan a great enterprise. He would meet her on the way back from Tavistock and ask her to marry him. He reflected and then hesitated. His old impetuosity was waning. He wondered what would happen to him if she refused. He considered that as yet he had not indicated by thought, action, or speech that he felt tenderly towards her. He set to work to wake the loverly mood. Yet something still lacked. He wondered what it was.

He almost wished there was another in the field. Then he asked himself whether there might not be. And then he began to think about his mother. Fine weather and fair things growing in spring, or dying beautifully in autumn, reminded him always of her. And worthy deeds did the like; and kind words and all that was of good repute.

He sat by the way for some time after Ruth had gone. Then suddenly he looked up and saw standing in front of him a woman with a heavy basket. She wore black, and the years rolled away and the woman reminded Ives of how she had looked in the past, when he met her after her baby died.

Jill had seen Ruth Rendle depart and resolved on this strong move. Now the man started and stared at her. He actually blushed, and she noted the fact, but her own skin showed no answering flush.

"I suddenly marked you on my way down. You was alone, so I ventured. Will you please let me thank you for all your kindness to my poor Samuel?"

"You needn't thank me. 'Twas my grandmother."

"I know better; but I'll leave that. Since I'm here, let me ax you to forgive me for all the past. I've been very wicked to you."

He breathed hard.

"What—what the devil d'you mean?" he asked.

"Have you forgot? You done right and I—but 'twas losing you at the last minute. No woman could get over it all at once. Pity me a bit and then you'll larn to forgive me. You was always able to forgive a girl anything."

"Why didn't you come to see my mother when she was dying?" he asked. "Lizzie told me long after that she'd sent to you and you wouldn't come."

"My wickedness and my loss. But 'tis like this: from that night, Ives, I was turned to gall. I had a devil come into me. I couldn't forgive you, or her, from that awful night till long, long after."

"You weren't straight with me. You waited till you knew your husband's uncle was going to be married. Then you said you'd run away, because t'other game was up. That's why I threw you over."

"I only ask you to forgive me. I make no excuses, though I'll swear afore my Maker that never influenced me. 'Twas respect for your mother, as well as love for you, that kept me fighting, till you was too much for me and made me promise. But I thank you for saving me at the end."

"And spurned me after as if I was unclean."

"We can't be large-minded at such times. How would you have felt to me if I'd kept you waiting till daybreak at the Windystone and never come to you?"

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean that your letter got to my husband, not to me. And I went that cursed morning and suffered as no woman ever suffered afore."

He stared.

"Samuel had the letter?"

"Yes; and let me go, and kept the secret close as wax. Only on his deathbed he told me and gave me the letter. Don't think hardly of him."

"Not me. And never said nothing, but gave

me a tract! I'll trouble you for that letter, however."

"Of course you shall have it. 'Twas a very wise letter. You've been the only light and sense that ever came into my life."

"What are you going to do?" he asked suddenly.

"Go back to my own people. Samuel left his cottage to his mother, till her death—then to me. And 'tis right she should come back to her own house. But, of course, I couldn't bide with her, though we're very good friends indeed now he's gone."

"You'll go home?"

"Yes, till I find work."

"I'll carry your basket back for you, and you can give me that letter now this minute," he said.

"Thank you kindly, Ives. And will you say you've forgived me for the past?"

"The past be past, and the less us call it back again the better."

At her cottage, however, Jill declared that she could not find the letter.

"You shall have it so soon as I can put my hand upon it," she said. "'Tis hidden away so safe that for the minute I can't exactly mind where 'tis. Come up to-morrow evening."

He promised to do so; and for that day this remarkable discovery so filled his imagination that Ruth, on her evening journey, saw nothing of him.

CHAPTER XXXV

DARKNESS ON GREAT MIS

ARTHUR BROWN had arrived at Vixen Tor for a few days after his return to England. He was very instructive, and never related any experience or incident without drawing some moral reflection therefrom. He showed himself deeply interested in his baby, and the father and son sometimes regarded each other in a manner that tempted Ives to amusement.

"Wonder what the thing will make of you," he said.

"Don't call him a 'thing'!" cried Lizzie, who had the baby on her lap.

"Your question should be, not so much what he will make of the author of his being, as what the author of his being will make of him," answered the schoolmaster. "Responsibility for the male parent begins a good deal sooner than most fathers imagine. Now I devote one whole hour of every day of my life to Arthur, though he is as yet but six months of age."

"Poor little devil!" said Ives.

"He loves his father," declared Lizzie. "After his father has been with him about half an hour, he always begins to say 'da-da-da,' and I know he's trying to say 'dad.'"

"More likely trying to say 'damn.'"

"Hush!" said Mr. Brown. "I beg you'll restrain yourself, Ives. It isn't fair to the child. The infant ear is extraordinarily sensitive and receptive, and we should strive from the earliest age to impart a proper choice of words. You cannot commence too soon. I want the child to pick up my diction. If you begin by making the young take life seriously, the temptation to do otherwise when they grow up is not so great."

"No fear for him. He'll take life serious enough when he sees t'other childer having sweeties and toys and him only getting sermons."

Lizzie protested, but Arthur held up his hand.

"Hear me, please, Lizzie. Toys are very much misunderstood. Every toy should combine instruction with innocent amusement. This is not appreciated. Now I shall . . ."

It was at this juncture that Ruth arrived, and she and Lizzie departed to admire the baby's distinctions in private.

Ives showed greater patience with his brother-in-law than of old, though Arthur irritated him as usual. But his counter-strokes were of a kind less elementary. He seldom swore and cursed; he uttered his own opinions on what Arthur called 'serious subjects'; and they awoke the fiercest antagonism. Indeed, Ives was somewhat interested to find that though Mr. Brown had never faltered in a cold patience before personal attack and even insult, yet he, too, could grow warm when his faith and the mainsprings of his mental and moral existence were attacked.

To please Lizzie, Ives went to church several times during the month she spent at her old home. He was reminded that Avisa always

liked him to go; and therefore again he went. His own mental life of late had widened and deepened; and the deeper he went the darker it became. The fountains of justice did not show themselves in the high places. He found them in man, never in God. He told Arthur Brown of this discovery, and pained the schoolmaster not a little.

They argued often, and the younger proceeded and explained himself so far as his vocabulary was equal to the task. Without assistance he had discovered the elementary fact that Nature's stern disciplines are concerned with man's flesh and blood, not his soul; that she punishes the sins of life against matter, not morals. No tares were ever yet chidden by Nature for choking good wheat: she helps them to do it; the goats are her chosen not less than the sheep. He had perceived that Nature knew nothing whatever about goodness or badness, and he began to wonder whether God did either. Nature put her foot down when man broke her laws; but whether he broke his own appeared to be a matter of perfect indifference to her.

"I suppose God made Nature," he said, "and He might have made her a bit fairer and a bit more sportsmanlike. Nature's that heartless, Arthur, that every hedge will show you things that make your blood boil. This merciful God of the sparrows ought to see after it."

"And d'you think He doesn't?" asked Brown.

"I know He doesn't," said the other. "Look at this."

He went to the mantelshelf and took from it a rabbit's skull. Some accident had overtaken the beast in life and deprived it of a tooth. The

responding incisor, thus freed from restraint and control, had slowly proceeded with growth, and finally destroyed the creature by starvation.

"Where was your God when that rabbit was dying?" said Ives.

"With the rabbit," answered Arthur stoutly. "Have no sorrow for the rabbit. These things happen and Nature does much that seems curious to our blind eyes. You might as well say, 'Where was God at the time of the great earthquake of Lisbon?' He was in the midst of it."

"Not him—up aloft, out of harm's away, looking on at the fun! Us have got to go down when Nature hits out, but we know she's hitting below the belt time and again. Why didn't your God make her fair to all? Nobody can answer that."

"We shouldn't attempt to. You oughtn't to think or say such things. Nature—well, Nature works by laws."

"And who made the laws? If you'd had to make 'em, would you have made 'em as they are?"

"I certainly shouldn't have made them better," said Mr. Brown.

"Then you ought to be ashamed," declared Ives hotly. "I'd have made 'em better, and if a just God had made 'em, He'd have made 'em better. My own belief is that He had nought to do with them. You'll read in Job, Arthur, that God let the Devil have a run for his money here and there, and sometimes I be of a mind to think . . ."

"Not the laws of Nature," declared Arthur with great conviction. "The Enemy of Mankind is allowed to have the power to tempt mankind. But God would not give the Evil One power

over life and death. Oh no; believe me, Ives, the Devil has no control over the forces of Nature."

"'Twas just a sportsmanlike idea of Moleskin's to get God out of the fix," explained Ives. "Him and me be both thinking men and great on justice in general; and we was wondering over this rabbit's head how God could reconcile it to His conscience to do such a damned cruel piece of work. We decided that God hadn't heard of it."

"All this tends to weakening of faith," said Mr. Brown. "If you, with your little finite mind—but you must read all that happens in the light of Divine Revelation, and then everything fits into its appointed place, and we render to Nature the things that are Nature's, and unto God the things that are God's. All will be made clear, be sure of that."

"And the Devil too. What's the end of him? I asked Moleskin, and he said, 'The end of the Devil is his tail. That's all we know in this world.' As a matter of fact nobody believes in the Devil nowadays—not even parsons."

"Oh yes, they do—all honest ones," answered Brown. "We understand the Devil better, that's all. There's a Devil, and every man knows it. And you know it."

Pomeroy laughed, and the argument ended in some annoyance on the one side and indifference on the other. Ives continued to attribute consciousness to Nature and arraign her accordingly; Mr. Brown continued to rely upon that verbiage and nebulous and slovenly thinking common in the rank and file of those who allege the possession of faith. Ives would strive to shock

Arthur, for the pleasure of seeing him shocked; Arthur never failed to afford Ives that pleasure. The younger man's attitude changed towards his sister's husband. Once he hated him, and now he despised him. It remained to show whether time would further modify his understanding of the schoolmaster, purify his view to pity, or exalt it to sympathy.

Ives saw Ruth home again after nightfall; he then kept his appointment with Jill; but the interview was shorter than she desired or intended. Her inclination tempted her to keep the famous letter; her wits told her that this would be impossible if for an instant she desired the goodwill of the man. She cursed herself for having mentioned the letter at all; but it had slipped out in presenting her case and her vigil. She felt that the vision of her tryst at the Windystone had impressed him; but, on the other hand, it was unfortunate that the letter must be relinquished at this moment.

Her dreams and hopes were crushed after Pomeroy had been in the house five minutes. He came for the letter and he came fresh from a rather emotional farewell. He had asked Ruth at leave-taking to walk with him on the Moor on the following Sunday, and she had agreed to do so. They planned a meeting, and already the man's mind was full of it, as he took his letter from Jill's hand.

"Will you come in a minute, Ives?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, "I'll come in and burn this letter at your fire, if you please. Sooner the better."

He destroyed the paper, and there was a pause.

"And so you go back to your own people?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Yet sometimes I'm half in a mind to stop along with the old woman and see her out. She've got very little life left in her, now that her son's dead."

He looked at Jill, and she understood.

"You'll find a better man than him come presently," he said.

She made no answer but a sigh; then, after an awkward interval, he spoke again.

"I may tell you that I hope to marry Miss Rendle very shortly."

As he spoke he saw her grow pale under the candle-light.

"'Twas always my mother's wish—not but what she's a powerful sight too good for me."

"No woman was ever that."

He saw tears glittering on her cheeks and rose hurriedly to depart.

"If ever I can do you a good turn, Jill," he said. Then he broke off. She buried her face in her arms on the table, and the mound of her wonderful hair shone close to the candle. From a mild and benignant spirit he leapt violently and fiercely to rage.

"God damn you all!" he said, and rushed out savagely.

His exit comforted her a good deal; she dried her eyes and still felt justified in a little hope. Such fury promised better than self-control and indifference had done. And yet her final thought that night brought back the tears again. He had said that he was going to marry Ruth Rendle, and he would not go back upon his word. She had lost him: there remained only the barren instinct of revenge. Well she knew, as all Merivale knew,

that Matthew Northmore hungered after Ruth, and that Northmore and Pomeroy were enemies. She strove for a plan, yet could find none.

But in all innocence Matthew helped the enemies of Ives next Sunday, for the master of Vixen Tor was late at Merivale Bridge through an incident at the farm, and when he arrived Ruth and Northmore had been talking together for half an hour. They were not at the bridge, since that spot was occupied, as often happened on Sunday afternoon; but Ives saw them on the bank of Walla a hundred yards away. They sat together and only rose at his approach. Then, not waiting to speak with him, Northmore abruptly departed. But Ruth smiled and held out her hand.

"He kept me company till you came," she said.

"Like his blasted impudence! Won't he never learn you don't want his company, long-faced dog? 'Tis a disgrace—and to go off like that . . ."

"You can't expect him to—but leave him. Smooth out your forehead, Ives."

"You meant that I couldn't expect that man to like me. More I do. All the same, to turn his back so and make me look a fool in sight of all they men on the bridge . . ."

Ruth seldom laughed; but now she did so, and the amusement was ill-timed.

"You're on his side, then?" he asked bluntly.

"I'm on no side," she said, growing grave again. "I know why you were angry with him, and I'm grateful. But—but—you see, you've threatened him and said harsh things in company."

"Keep walking," he answered. "Better leave that. I shall do more than threaten afore long."

A moody fit got hold upon him. He had started to ask her to marry him, but for the present he put any such thought out of his head. They tramped together, and she tried hard to lift him up and raise his spirit; but she failed. This walk had been the dream of her week, and her heart had whispered that the man would speak to her before the end of it. But now she grew faint before his silence and, just as Ives began to recover, nigh the ragged crown of Great Mis, Ruth's own spirit sank. The place and the weather braced him; they depressed her. At the critical moment, when one more cheerful speech might have brought happiness to his face again, her patience gave out.

"I'm tired and cold," she said.

The sudden petulance in her voice struck Pomeroy and surprised him. He did not blame himself for it. He only felt glad that he had not relaxed.

"Better rest a bit. Then we'll go back; and I'll leave you at Stone Park, if you like."

His ferocity calmed her again.

"You oughtn't to say that."

"Sit here and look out over," he answered. "'Tis all ugly and 'twill suit us, for we'm all ugly too by the sound of our voices."

She relented a little more, and they sat without speaking and looked at the hand of late autumn working upon the waste.

A high wind laden with occasional showers flogged the Moor, hummed against the granite, and set the dying herbage shivering with waves of colourless light. Upon the sallow spaces of

the hills cloud shadows rolled heavily; aloft, in a wild grey herd, the clouds stampeded over the blue. Here stragglers broke away and fled alone; here, afar, the masses darkened and slant rain fell from them, brightening the gloom of one great hill and dimming the light of another.

Pomeroy sat himself with his face to the utmost desolation. He turned from the fertile low lands and let the wind buffet his left cheek, so that his eyes might reflect only the north and north-east of the wilderness. Ruth did likewise, and together they gazed very far off into the passes of Tavy and upon the dim, granite crowns of Great Links.

The sun beat down suddenly on Ruth's brown neck and warmed her; but the caress from the sky seemed to miss the man. Rain followed, in a brief driving spit and fury. Then sunshine roamed again over the moisture-laden miles and woke a wonder of light upon them.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked.

"Trying not to think. What's the good? Nothing ever comes out of it all. If you could stick a knife into the thinking place in my head and stop the works for evermore, I should be that much happier."

"Better stick it into your heart while you're about it. Then you'll never be miserable again," she said.

He stared at the sky and then at her.

"You're right there! But that's not the sort of advice I should look to you to give."

"No—'twasn't your mother taught me that," she said.

Presently Ruth asked him to forgive her.

"I get wicked thoughts sometimes — frantic and mad. I've tried so hard to hide them from

you. But now you've catched me in one. Forgive me, Ives."

"I like you the better for being a bit desperate now and again," he answered. "It brings you nearer to such as me."

He stopped, and silence fell again.

They talked into a placid mood presently, but Pomeroy's desire to offer marriage was for the moment suspended. And yet he loved the woman better now, in this hour of storm-laden gloaming, darkening heath, and shouting wind, than ever he had loved her.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PROSPECTS FOR JILL

A MONTH AFTER her meeting with Ives and the surrender of his letter, Jill Bolt called to Mr. Codd as he was passing her cottage door. She spoke with affected indifference, but he was quick of perception in the matter of an enemy, and brushed away her pretences. The fact that she should again make mention of his old master to him told Emmanuel that Jill's private hopes had failed her.

"Yes," he said, "I don't change. I'm all of a piece in my hate of that vile chap, but at my age patience be a part of us. I'll bide my time."

"He's going to marry Ruth Rendle."

"His mother always hungered after it, but of course he took good care not to let her have the joy of seeing it done."

"They're not married yet."

Jill was packing a crate with a few of the things that Samuel had bought for her.

"You be going, then?" he said, not answering her last remark.

"Yes—next week. The old woman don't want me, but she do want the cottage, so I shall get out of it."

"You'll find another husband. I should have

thought, now you was free, that man would have jumped at you."

"'Twas always his way never to want what he could have. If Ruth Rendle had been tokened or married, he'd have been frantic for her long ago."

"If there's one thing I should like to do," said Emmanuel, " 'tis to get that girl for Matthew Northmore. 'Twould be killing two birds with one stone."

"A great idea certainly."

"You've come round again, then?"

She looked calmly at Emmanuel.

"Us have got to fight for ourselves against you silly men," she said. "Pomeroy thinks he went too far with that girl afore my husband died. Ban't outside human power to choke 'em apart yet. He cursed when he told me about it. I know what that meant."

"You'm wishful for to marry him still, then?"

"Yes, I be."

Mr. Codd appeared doubtful.

"Then I don't see how you an' me can cabal against him to much purpose. I'm hungry for to mar him, not serve the anointed scamp."

"I can't explain how I feel about it. Such a man as you wouldn't understand. I don't mind how he smarts, so long as the smarting will bring him to me. Let him smart and I'll heal the smart later."

"He won't want you to kiss the wounds—not if he knows you made 'em."

"That's just what he won't know."

"You're too difficult for me," declared Mr. Codd. "All the same, if you want him smote and can think of a right way, say it. For my part, I can't light on no better thought than firing

his ricks. Weather's turning properly dry and —'tis easy."

"That won't help me. Leave it a bit and see how the cat jumps. Perhaps she'll think better of taking him before the time comes."

"And you could go back to that fool in cold blood!"

"Yes. A farm's a farm, and he stands to work now and be going on well."

"If he treated his wife no better than his work-people, you'd have a poor time of it."

"I could manage him all right if once I got him."

"Too late, if he'm tokened to t'other. She won't give him up."

"You can leave that side to me," said Jill; "a woman's pretty quick where she feels a big interest, like what I do in Pomeroy. I'll come up to Stone Park and have a tell with you one day when Northmore's out of the way."

A figure stood at the door, and the shrunken shadow of Rachel Bolt fell on the threshold. She had aged and was little more than a sad-eyed ghost. Even the old woman's voice had grown more feeble and more mournful in its cadence.

"Come in, mother," said Jill kindly. "'Tis only Mr. Codd lending a hand with my packing."

"But I must be off now," announced Emmanuel. "Good evening to you, Mrs. Bolt."

He went his way and Rachel shook her head.

"Pray God it won't be long. I've only got one thing to say beside the Lord's Prayer now when I get down on my knees, and that be to ask the Almighty to let Samuel be the angel that comes to fetch me. The joy of that! And it can be done. All things are possible with the Almighty."

"Yes, yes. See here, mother. I've left them vases on the mantelshelf, because he was special fond of 'em; and the pictures I be going to leave also, because the paper's faded round 'em and 'twill spoil the room to move them."

"'Tis very good of you; but these kind things you be saying make it so much harder to tell what I've come to tell."

"You want something else of his?"

"Only one thing. I'll let all the rest go gladly—all. I've longed and longed for it ever since I got back my reason, but I couldn't bring myself to dare ask. 'Tis almost too much, I'm afraid."

Jill shrugged her shoulders.

"I've never refused nothing, mother."

"You haven't; but this is different. 'Tis greedy of me—even his mother—to ask for it. Yes, 'tis too great a thing."

"If you mean the cottage, you be going to have it and live in it for the rest of your life. I can't do no more than that."

"'Tisn't the cottage, and I shall pay proper rent for the cottage, like anybody else would. Samuel would have wished it—such a just man as him, and honourable to a halfpenny. Four shillings a week will you have, so long as I live. But there's something more by far than that."

"Say it, then. If 'tis in my power . . ."

"You say that because you can't guess I'd be so bold. But—well—it must out. I was wondering if just for my lifetime—of course to come back to you after . . ."

Still she hesitated and sniffed and grew tearful. But Jill had learned patience since her husband's death and did not hurry her.

"Don't take on, there's an old dear. We under-

stand each other very well now, I'm sure. Never a word since our dear Samuel went home."

"No, no, never a word. You did all mortal woman could, and was much, much more of a comfort to him than they two grand nurses, I'm sure."

"Don't be frightened to say it, then. 'Tis granted before you ax, if in my power."

"In a word—the flute—his li'l precious flute, Jill. D'you think you could do it? Be it too much? But if you only knowed what a sad, blessed joy 'twould be to me . . ."

Jill secretly thanked Heaven that she had not burned the flute; but she remembered the intention to do so when examining Samuel's possessions after the funeral.

"Why, of course you can have it, my dear. I don't know where 'tis for the minute; but 'tis safe enough, no doubt."

The old mother's eyes grew round through her tears.

"'Safe'! My God!" she half whispered.

Then she thanked Jill humbly and implored her to seek at once for the flute. They hunted together, and Rachel herself discovered it. The scrap of wood her son's lips and fingers had so often pressed was dusty and dirty. It had been thrust into a cupboard and forgotten. Now Rachel cleaned it with her apron, kissed it, and pressed it to her cheek.

"'Twill come back to you when I'm taken," she said. "Have no fear for that."

"I don't want it, mother. It shall go in your coffin with you if you like."

"A very beautiful and generous thought. Maybe he'd have wished it. And thank you—words

can't thank you; but I'll pray down thanks; and he'll be pleased about it where he is."

She kissed Jill and then went away with her riches; but the younger widow's packing was destined to be still further interrupted, for a man came to the door and knocked five minutes after her mother-in-law had departed. In the dusk she did not recognise him. Then he spoke and she knew the voice.

"I'll get a lamp, Mr. Toop. Be so kind as to step in," said Jill. "No doubt 'tis about the stone that you be come."

"It is," he admitted, "and for other reasons likewise."

He entered, put his hat on the table, and brought some papers out of his pocket.

"Business first," said Mr. Toop, "and pleasure afterwards."

"Pleasure? I haven't had much pleasure in my life."

"Oh, 'twas nothing—only my wish to lend you a hand if you'd allow of it. The things—the boxes and such-like. I wanted to say as I shall be very pleased to send round Bob and my cart and move them for you to Sampford Spiney free, gratis, and for nothing."

"Really, you mean that, Mr. Toop?"

"I do, Mrs. Bolt—or Jill, if I may call you so."

"I can't refuse—too poor," she said. "But I'm afraid 'tis money out of your pocket."

"Let me know just when you want the cart and it shall be here."

"'Tis terrible kind, Mr. Toop."

"Say nothing to nobody, Jill. 'Tis my little affair. Not a word to my brother. Joel's grown rather acid of late, along of his shortness of

breath. But as for me, I catch myself whistling like a boy, and have to stop myself a dozen times a day and remember my calling."

She nodded, looked at his sturdy body, his eyes behind their glasses, his bald head, and great snuff-stained beard. Romance, indeed, perished in the atmosphere of Peter Toop, yet there was something romantic in this offer to take her boxes home for nothing. It represented about five shillings' worth of pure romance, or possibly more.

"I don't see that you grow older," she said.

"I've had enough to make me here and there; and to mark Joel going down the hill is a sad spectacle, day in, day out. Then there's the business of people's coffins and all the living among black-clad, broken-hearted fellow-creatures. Still, as you say, Jill, I keep young and feel young. Lord knows what I should have been in a lively walk of life—as merry as David afore the ark, I reckon."

"About this here stone to Samuel?"

"Well, his dear mother wanted half the Bible put on the monument; but I've had to explain there's a right and wrong way with such things. Finally she've come down to a text and a verse out of a hymn. That leaves a place for anything you might like to say."

"Put 'Gone, but not forgotten,'" said Jill. "That's true enough, and that's all I've got to say. I never shall forget him, poor man."

Mr. Toop uttered a great expiration of breath.

"It won't offend you if I take a pinch?" he asked.

"No. I don't mind a little snuff about."

"You say 'Gone, but not forgotten.' Well, Jill, I wouldn't put that."

"Why not?"

"'Tis a sort of challenge and might be quoted against you when you take your next. Your heart won't forget him; but I shouldn't carve such a thing on his grave. Memory's a tricky item. You'm only how many years old—twenty-eight, perhaps?"

"I'm twenty-six."

"Beg pardon, I'm sure; a hole in my manners to put on two years like that."

"I've felt fifty of late. I'm old for my years. Rivers of tears I've wept this year—oceans and rivers of 'em. I don't suppose I shall marry again."

"You must cheer up, my dear, if you'll pardon the freedom. You must cheer up and remember where he is now. Such a musicker as he was—why, heaven will be the very delight of his days, and he'll take his place along with the sackbuts and dulcimers and all kinds of music. And as to you not marrying, he was far too sensible a man ever to wish that."

"Well, I won't put it then, if you're against it. I'll have what you please."

"There's texts that don't commit man or woman and can't be brought up again, whatever happens. I'll find something affectionate, Jill, and at the same time guarded, such as 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away.' Leave it to me."

"I'm sure I don't see why you should take such a dreadful deal of trouble for a poor friendless woman."

"I'm proud to do it. Now, can I lend a hand with that box, or can't I?"

"No, thank you."

"Then I'll go. Don't you take on. You've had plenty of trials in your life, but a good time may be coming."

"I belong to an unlucky family."

He went his way through the darkness, and she stood and watched him depart. He walked firmly and whistled loudly as he went. The whistle reminded Jill of Samuel's flute, but she liked it better. Peter as a possible husband flashed upon her. Characteristically, Jill pondered the possibility with neither relish nor distaste. Mr. Toop would mean riches beyond the height of her ambition; he would also probably mean widowhood while she was still in possession of some feminine glories. She rated him as a well-preserved man of sixty-five, or perhaps a little less. He might last for ten or even fifteen years.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A MATCHBOX

TIME AND CHANCE combined to precipitate the cloudy ferocity of Mr. Codd and make his long-delayed revenge a practical thing. There came a dawn when he found himself no nearer his purpose than usual; but before midnight the deed was done and a punishment far above Emmanuel's highest flight of inspiration planned for Ives. That it involved villainy on his own part was true; but the old man did not stop to consider. Only after the fever of that day was dead came leisure to examine his performance; and then he smothered conscience by thinking upon Pomeroy in the past and the many outrages that he had suffered at his hands.

There came a time towards December when east winds blew, and after autumnal torrents the world was dried again by harsh currents of air that had swept the wilderness for many days. Then, on a certain morning, Emmanuel Codd sat under the west side of a haystack at Stone Park and waited for Jill Bolt. The meeting was planned with deliberation, because upon this day Matthew Northmore had gone from home to Tavistock. He proposed to hunt with the Lamerton Hounds, off Dartmoor, and make Tavistock

his headquarters for two nights. A hind and his wife were daily expected at Stone Park to take the place of servants who had gone; but the newcomers had not yet arrived, and for the moment Codd was in sole charge.

Now he smoked and waited for Jill, who had promised to see him there at midday. She did not, however, immediately arrive, and Emmanuel, rising to see if Mrs. Bolt was on the road, jumped suddenly to observe a very different person approaching Stone Park.

Ives Pomeroy appeared. He was riding, and presently opened the gate with his hunting crop and entered. Codd did not move from his seat under the stack until Ives had lifted his voice and loudly called him thrice. Then he came forward with surly indifference.

"What d'you want?" he said. "Mr. Northmore's to Tavistock."

"I know that; 'tis the reason I'm here—to have a few words with you."

"I'd sooner talk to any other man."

Ives laughed with the consciousness of one who brings good news unexpectedly. He could take liberties even with the ferocious Codd, because he brought with him news that must make the ancient amiable.

"You wait till you hear what the few words be, my old blackguard. Don't look as if you fed on sloans. I'm your master no more; but I don't want to be your enemy."

"You'll be my enemy till you or me go to our graves."

"Sit down and smoke," answered Ives. "It all fits in quite well: Northmore out of the way, and you alone, and me on my way up

over to Amicombe Hill peatworks. So here I am."

He tethered his horse, took a seat with his back to the rick, and made Codd sit down beside him.

"I've learned something of late," he said.

"There's a lot for you to larn. Your mother's son might have larned justice if nought else."

"You've hit it first shot. My mother's son did ought to be a just man, I'll grant you. I've thought about different matters since you came here, and been in a pretty good rage off and on to see what scant justice is about in the world."

"Look at home."

Ives laughed, opened his tobacco pouch, and filled his pipe.

"You take the words out of my mouth. 'Twas at home I did look, after being mighty vexed with the way of things everywhere else. And, seeing what I saw, I found out, partly, why I'd been in such a deuce of a temper of late days. I did a wrong thing back-along; but I've been a lot better in my mind since I decided to right it."

"'Twill take you all your time to right the wrong things you've done."

The other lit his pipe. Then he put his hand into his pocket, brought out a few papers, and selected one from among them.

"I've been going into figures. Touching your pension, Emmanuel, I let my own feelings have too much play. I forgot that 'twas my mother's wish to pension you, and I forgot how you looked in her eyes. Her will left it to me. I wasn't worthy of that trust, Codd, when I threw you off in a tantrum."

"No, you never was worthy of being trusted by anybody."

"Perhaps not; but what's done can be altered sometimes. I'm going to raise your pension, because I know I'm under the figure my mother would have wished for you."

"Yes, a cruel long way under."

Pomeroy showed a little irritation at these uncompromising replies. Then he proceeded.

"That's granted—in reason. Well, I'll mend it."

"If you mean justice and not only to talk and take credit, you'll have to go back to the beginning—I suppose you'd thought of that. The pension—a pittance rather than a pension—have been going on now a good few months."

"You're an ungrateful brute, Codd—a cursed, crabbed heart in you—like a wolf. No kindness will ever tame you."

"Not your sort of kindness. You want me to go down on my knees and thank you for this, and tell you that you're a fine fellow and worthy of Avisa Pomeroy's memory and all the rest. Well, I ban't going to do it. I've been a just man these sixty years—just to all and honest as the light. But nobody ever thanked me for being so straight. Nobody's ever thanked in this world for doing their duty—rare though it is; and because it's been put into you to do your duty towards me I'm not going to thank you, so you needn't think it."

Ives felt his heart grow hot, and the old loathing for Emmanuel, stilled of late by absence, burnt up in him again.

"So much for that, then. You're getting—what is it?—two shillings and six a week, aren't you?"

"Yes, six pounds odd a year for fifty years of sleepless service!"

"I'll make it seven shillings. A shilling a day for the rest of your life, Codd."

"Justice—eh? And then you'll go up hill and down dale and tell 'em what a damned fine man you be, and what a godsend to the poor!"

This was too much for Ives. He leapt to his feet, cursed Mr. Codd heartily, declared that he would stop the pension altogether, and then departed in a passion. Emmanuel watched him gallop off over Long Stone hill and hoped that the young man would break his neck before that day was done. Then he reflected upon his own performance. Lust to smite and hurt his enemy mastered him. He longed at that moment to go forth and fire the man's rick or hough his cattle. He had perhaps lost a shilling a day for pure enmity, and nobody would pity him when the truth was known. He knew well that a shilling a day was handsome and that all men would say so; but he had insulted the giver and sacrificed the gift.

Upon the frantic malignity awakened by these considerations came Jill Bolt. Ives had not been gone half an hour before she filled his place, sat in the seat under the rick, and turned over in her hand a matchbox that he had forgotten in his abrupt and furious departure.

"'Twas given him long time agone by Ruth Rendle," said Mr. Codd. "He must have been in a proper tantara to have left that. And he forgot his papers too."

Jill picked them up, then put them down again after brief examination.

"A bill and a letter from that woman at Tavistock."

"Her?"

"Yes."

"I've just had a proper row with him afore you came. Rode up as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, and offered me a shilling a day instead of fourpence! I tried to get him to be honest and named his mother to him; and that made him mad. I expected his horse-whip round me, old though I am."

"Where's he gone to?"

"To Amicombe Hill, to the peatworks."

"When will he come back?"

"Towards nightfall, no doubt."

She reflected. The means to do an evil deed lay under her hand, and Codd made her thought easy of utterance.

"For two pins I'd go down to-night, after dusk, afore the man comes back, and fire his big stack."

"There's a better way," she said. "Everything be ripe and ready, if so be you're still set on reading him a lesson. What d'you want to fire his rick for? Fire this one that we're sitting under! Here's paper and matches all ready for you."

"What's the sense of that?"

"You're dull. Why, haven't you got the place to yourself and his papers and his box of matches in your hand? Pretty tidy proofs—eh?"

Emmanuel stared, and the point of the enterprise slowly forced itself into his mind.

"You mean that they'll think as he have done it?"

"Why not? He's up this way and will come back this way after dark. He knows that Northmore is at Tavistock. You see the fire and find his box o' matches and burnt paper next morning, or leave 'em somewhere for others to find. This

east wind will take the fire from the rick to yon shippon. You find 'tis flaming and come running out, too late to do anything. Why, the man would get five years or more if it went all right. You spread a bit of fire come presently, my old boy, and see 'tis well on light afore you go to bed."

"What about Northmore?"

"'Tis doing him a rare good turn too. Once the chap's cooling his heels in clink, all's clear for Northmore with Ruth. If Ives be put away, she might take him, and he'd gladly pay more than the price of a rick and a shippon for her."

"To think as that flashed afore your mind so lightning quick! Leave the rest to me. You look out from Merivale after dusk to-night and you'll see more than moonlight. Everything be like tinder."

"And mind you put the matchbox and the papers away in a safe place, Emmanuel. The plan will be to twist up the papers and let 'em be a bit burned, as though he'd made a fire with 'em."

"Trust me."

"If you could tell just about when he'll be coming back-along, 'twould help you for time."

"I must chance that. I shall make the fire somewheres about eight o'clock and then go to bed. 'Twill be seen from Merivale, and the folk will come up and rouse me."

"Everybody's heard him say a lot of things against Northmore."

"Yes, they have, and against every other honest man. 'Tis just the thing he would do. I most wonder he haven't done it afore now."

"He'll have done it by this time to-morrow," said Jill coolly. "He's known for a reckless chap.

He's seen inside of prison afore to-day. 'Tis well in keeping with the man to do it. Everybody will believe it against him: Northmore so quick as any."

"Us must bring it out very cunning," declared Mr. Codd. "I shall find these here things to windward of the hayrick and take 'em straight to master."

"No, no! that would mar all, because everybody knows you hate the man. Put the things where Northmore will find 'em for himself. Don't you meddle in it. 'Tis enough you see your master finds all."

"The devil's own you be!"

They parted then, and Jill returned to Merivale.

She was standing at her mother-in-law's door that night after dusk with Peter Toop. He expatiated upon his growing fortune, and she half listened while her eyes strained upon the darkness of the Moor. Then light twinkled across it and flashed. A red star appeared and seemed steadily to grow. The undertaker had his back turned to the valley under Great Mis Tor, and did not see the light for twenty minutes; but presently a man ran past and called his attention to it.

"Something wrong at Stone Park," he said. "There's fire there."

Mr. Toop turned and screwed up his eyes. Then he bade Jill good night and hastened down the hill. A quarter of an hour later, with half a dozen other men, he set out over the Moor and proceeded as fast as possible through the night to Stone Park.

Moleskin, Joel Toop, and Rupert Johnson were

of the company, and with them hastened several labourers and a dozen boys.

"The man's away," said Mr. Cawker. "There's nobody there at all but old Codd."

"So like as not they've knocked him on the head and set the place afire to hide their crime," suggested Joel. "Northmore's always good for twenty or thirty pound in cash, and some bad characters have got to know it."

"As for Codd, I know of no man us could better spare," began Moleskin; then he was interrupted by the sound of a galloping horse and Moleskin changed his speech to a yell, for in another moment he must have been ridden down.

"Hold on! Hold on! Who is it? Be that you, Emmanuel?" he shouted.

Then Pomeroy pulled up, and his weary beast stretched its legs, put its head down and panted.

"You're too late, boys. Rick's gone and the shippon too. Poor damned things in it squealing like hell; but I couldn't let 'em out. I've burnt myself as 'tis, trying."

"Who be up there?"

"Not a soul. I bawled but couldn't make none hear. That knave Codd ought to be there if he haven't come to grief. Us may save a bit; but the rick's done for, and the little rick fifty yards off is afire too."

He returned with them, and through the dark dry silence of night they soon heard the fire roaring. The roof of the shippon had fallen in, and the animals that it contained were dead. Through smoke and smother came the stench of roasting flesh.

"'Tis the man's three pedigree heifers!" cried Joel Toop. "What a cruel calamity. The hay was nought to that."

All worked amain to circumscribe and stamp out the fire. Then suddenly shrill cries arose, and in the fitful light appeared the spectacle of Emmanuel Codd hanging out of an attic window on the roof of the farm. He was illuminated in flashes of intermittent fire and became invisible between them.

"For God's sake save me, souls!" he yelled.

"Come down, you old fool!" roared Moleskin. "You're safe enough; the farm's not touched and the fire's got under."

Then Emmanuel descended in his shirt only. They sent him back to dress, and by the time that he had done so the fire was nearly out.

Much damage had been done, and Codd, who was in a condition of great excitement and collapse, refused to stop alone through the night. All stayed for some time to see that no fire broke forth again; and then the main company, much reinforced since the beginning of the tragedy, returned to Merivale, while a policeman and Rupert Johnson stopped with Codd until the morning.

Ives was the centre of interest, though he could tell the people little. He had marked the fire on his homeway journey, and hastened his horse when he perceived it. But, once arrived at Stone Park, he found himself too late to be of service. He supposed the place empty, and had therefore galloped forward, as fast as a tired horse could take him, to give the alarm.

Many theories of the catastrophe were advanced.

"'Tis a terrible bad stroke," declared Moleskin. "My heart bleeds for them beautiful young beasts. They had 'Sultan' for a sire, and they would have been worth their weight in gold some day."

"Let the man smart, and be damned to him," answered Pomeroy. "'Tis his turn, ban't it? I'm not sorry, for my part. Shows he'm not bullet-proof more than his neighbours."

But Moleskin reproved these sentiments.

"Mustn't say that now. 'Twas so once; but he's a reformed character of late, and ban't for our side to speak against him, or wish him ill. Drinks as hard as the best of us now. And mad on a woman. What more can you ax of any honest chap?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ARSON

A TELEGRAM on the following morning informed Matthew Northmore of his bad fortune, and an element of superstition in the man received the news with equanimity. From the first he associated the catastrophe with Ruth. He could not explain to himself this impression, but it existed, and looking back, long afterwards, he marvelled as at a miracle. For there seemed no ground in reason why the fate of the girl should be influenced by the destruction of his rick and pedigree calves.

Codd had first word with Northmore on the day that followed the fire; and he lied in a manner to deceive any man. His tale was natural and contained nothing to arouse the least suspicion; but Emmanuel reserved his master-stroke until later in the day, because he knew that Ives would come to speak with Matthew, and he desired to do nothing definite until Pomeroy had visited Stone Park and left it.

The interview between the farmers was not a long one. The elder proved cold and indifferent; he barely thanked Ives for his great efforts at the fire, and showed no particular interest in the details. Pomeroy, quick to catch the opposing

mood, on his side let his eagerness wane. He told how he had seen the fire from the Moor and made haste to no purpose. It was not until he mentioned his conversation with Codd during the previous morning that Northmore felt interested.

"He said that you stopped a few minutes, and then lost your temper and cussed and swore at me and a few more people; then went your way."

"He lies as usual. I cussed and swore at him, as well I might—the knave; but at none else. I talk to people's faces, not behind their backs. I offered the man to increase his pension to a shilling a day, because it came over me that I'd given him less than my mother might have willed. That's why I stopped. Then he turns round and spits out his gall like a gallied snake. Who wouldn't curse the fool?"

"He said that you threatened to be level with me again."

"I never named your name. But I'm not here now to answer to you for anything, I believe. I worked like ten men to help dout the fire, and if you've got nought but frosty looks, may you do better next time yourself, and burn your hands to the elbows, as I did yesterday. A minute ago, when I came in this room, I was full sorry I hadn't ridden down over from Amicombe sooner, so as I might have at least waked that old brute and saved your calves. Now I don't care a rap, and I'm glad you've suffered. You don't deserve to be luckier than the rest of us. And if you want to know how this fell out, you needn't look further than Emmanuel Codd. He was sitting against the ricks smoking yesterday, and 'twas he that burnt you out, be sure of that. So good day to you."

In a hot mood Ives departed, and this incident served long to cast him back into the old slough of turmoil and mental unquiet. Again his sense of justice was outraged, and he stormed to think that Northmore could view his efforts so coldly. Had he guessed what was happening in secret, Pomeroy might have taken swift steps before it was too late; but not until many days had passed did he learn of the things conceived and plotted against him, and by that time their consequences could not be evaded.

Mr. Codd heard Ives depart after his interview with Matthew Northmore; and then his master called him.

"Pomeroy says that he never mentioned my name yesterday."

"Liar! He cussed you with every crooked word he knows. And me too."

Mr. Codd affected great indignation. Then the thing happened that he desired and Northmore went out on to the farm.

The trap was set. From under the edge of a haystack, to the rear of that destroyed by fire, a piece of paper peeped. Codd saw his master stoop and pick it up. Then he hastened out of sight.

Not until after dark did the old man venture in the direction of the lure. Then he found that all his bait had vanished.

Matthew meantime explained this discovery to himself. The papers had been thrust beneath the stack and so escaped observation. Then had come a current of air and blown this out under his eyes. It was clear that he who set the papers there alight had counted on their destruction in the conflagration of the second rick; but the

torch went out too soon and the hay had escaped.

Fifty years earlier, so Northmore reflected, Ives Pomeroy would have been hung for his night's work. He pieced the plot carefully, saw his enemy return after dark, set the farm on fire, lie hidden until all was ablaze past extinction, and then pretend to discover the catastrophe and gallop off to bring succour.

For a time the excitement of this revelation took Northmore out of himself. His indignation mastered him. He considered his burnt beasts, and he raged a while and determined that this villainy should meet a just reward. It was notorious that Pomeroy had threatened to do him great harm, and here, at the first safe opportunity, he had kept his promise.

Northmore acted in wrath, and Mr. Codd, creeping about close at hand, was not astonished to hear himself called. He appeared before his master, and Northmore spoke:

"Go to Merivale police station; see Inspector Bachelor and tell him I want him."

Codd peered about stealthily, but the evidences of Pomeroy's guilt were not visible.

"The inspector—have 'e got a clue?" he asked eagerly.

But Matthew was not prepared to share confidence with Emmanuel.

"Go at once and don't chatter," he answered; so Mr. Codd departed.

"They'll take him to-night," reflected Emmanuel. "I must get down-along again on some errand. I wouldn't miss it for money?"

His legs went swiftly as he hurried off to Merivale; but the thought of Northmore travelled

still faster, and ere the aged sinner had reached his destination his master's mind was altered. Indeed, Matthew soon felt surprised to think that, even for a moment, he could have lost sight of what this might mean. The old intuition that had flashed across his mind when first the ill news came returned now; the riddle was read; he saw the immense possibilities of this incident staring out very clearly at him. His human instinct was to leap forward and complete all before reason, honour, and his sense of right had leisure to sway him. The problem promised to be one of very simple proportions; but he could not instantly decide. Indeed, after the first feverish lust to leave no moment wasted before he should reach Ruth, he relapsed into a lethargy. He brought forth the matchbox and papers again, and was sitting motionless, staring at them, when Codd and Inspector Bachelor returned.

Then Matthew acted with celerity and, at the first sound of their voices, concealed the property of Ives Pomeroy and securely locked it up.

The interview that followed was widely different from any that Emmanuel Codd imagined. Indeed, nothing of interest transpired, and Northmore, far from bringing charges, or endeavouring to incriminate his enemy, never mentioned him save in one connection.

"When Ives Pomeroy came to tell me what he knew this afternoon," explained Matthew, "he said that he saw my own man, Codd, sitting smoking against the identical rick that was burned. I say this that you may remember there is a possible sort of explanation, apart from any idea of arson."

"So Pomeroy told me. 'Twas said this morn-

ing in the yard when I was here, and Codd got very short and answered 'twas a lie of Pomeroy's made up to harm him," answered the policeman.

They discussed the incident from every possible point of view, and Bachelor was bound to confess that as yet no clue had been secured. A tramp, who slept over-night in a ruined shepherd's hut near Merivale, had been arrested during the day; but he was liberated after examination.

"You'll never find it out," foretold Northmore. "For my part, I have felt this thing would be a mystery from the first. It is just bad luck, and, though the fire will always be associated with Codd, I do not blame him. Indeed, I feel positive he is not responsible."

"Are you insured?"

"The hay, yes. Not the cattle, unfortunately."

Inspector Bachelor went his way; then Codd appeared, hopeful that some news might await him; but Northmore disappointed the plotter and bade him retire.

Instead, however, the old man crept off again to Merivale with his ears hollowed to catch a breath of news. But nothing was said, and nothing was known. At the Jolly Huntsmen a theory gained ground that Mr. Codd himself had accidentally done all the damage.

His master meantime still sat in his room with the door locked. Great questions asked themselves in Northmore's brain, and he could not answer them.

Should Ruth hear of this? What line would she take? The truth none could reasonably doubt upon his evidence, and the punishment of such a performance would not be less than five

years' penal servitude. Such a sentence must be another name for ruin. Even as his own great opportunity dawned out of this welter, like a red sun out of a snow-cloud, Northmore had time to be astonished that any respectable man could thus face destruction. None he had ever known, excepting only Ives, was built on a mental plan to commit such a folly. Northmore tried to consider the position from the point of view of Pomeroy, and he made the worst case possible against himself; but, allowing for everything, he could find no grounds sufficient for this rascality. Then he thought of Ruth Rendle; and the suspected outrage of his enemy, seen by that light, assumed more reasonable proportions. Pomeroy's attitude to Ruth had surely changed, and he was now jealous. Past words and threats all began to look reasonable and orderly upon such an explanation; and yet Northmore asked himself again and again how Ives could for an instant be jealous of so futile a rival. But possibly Pomeroy did not know that his rival was in reality so weak; perchance he thought that Ruth still lingered in two minds; perhaps he suspected that the increased prosperity of Northmore was inclining the girl towards him. This stroke could be explained in that manner. From which point Matthew even dared to wonder whether Ruth might not be changing.

He thought all through that night, and he came to the fixed assurance that only a fool would neglect this amazing opportunity. Three lives were threatened, and anon, not without sophistry, he proved to his own satisfaction that the course he proposed to take was absolutely the right one and best calculated to advance the welfare of these

involved souls. Northmore spun a great web and caught himself hard and fast. He decided that Pomeroy was proved utterly and hopelessly unsuited to be Ruth's husband, even if he now had reached the point of desiring to be; and he satisfied himself that, rather than let Ives suffer penal servitude, Ruth would . . . He allowed his thoughts to push him no farther in that direction.

He rested but two hours and slept not at all. At dawn he rose, made a meal, and bade Codd saddle his horse. Life stood still with him until this vital matter was done. All looked reasonable in the sunshine as he rode to Tavistock and smoothed out his crumpled thoughts of the preceding night; but he could not tell how his story might sound uttered aloud in the presence of Ruth.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE ORDEAL

THE STORM-DRIVEN NORTHMORE fought long, and lost. Self-respect and justice went down before this temptation, and a nature, sapped of late by the strain and nervous fever begot of passion, found itself not strong enough to resist. The circumstances of his case were peculiar and unfortunate, for Ruth's refusal could not extinguish his fires. Blindly, dumbly he clove to her; vainly he hoped. But the folly of such comportment drove in upon him during his saner hours; and then, that he might fight the tremendous depression awakened by a just view of his conduct, he sought wherewith to drown the truth and threatened to become intemperate. Northmore for the space of a year had drunk alone. None ever saw him intoxicated, and to that point he did not reach; but he took enough to numb his innate characteristics; his will had weakened from the time that he began to love Ruth; and, in the hour of temptation, he succumbed. Very many arguments of great sufficiency presented themselves and battled with conscience now. Only Ruth herself was the difficulty; but, as he rode to Tavistock, he slurred over that aspect of the moment. Let her marry him, and

the sequel would show that she had acted wisely, and that he had done well to force her. Moreover, since Pomeroy was proved a barefaced and deliberate rascal, the sooner Ruth knew it the better. Her own welfare must be vitally involved, and he now felt that nothing would be more fatal for her than union with the master of Vixen Tor.

At the bottom of all his convictions moved an instinct struggling for life; but he gave no heed to that. He appreciated it to the extent of mental discomfort, yet he told himself fiercely that this was not conscience, but a vague folly bred of his sportsman's ideas—a hunting man's erroneous notion of fairness. And then he remembered his cattle and banished this last scruple. The man who deliberately burnt live animals to gratify a spirit of revenge, might well be counted beyond the pale of all sporting consideration. Pomeroy deserved worse than the world would mete to him.

At this stage in his progress Matthew almost doubted, after all, if his plans might not miscarry. Ruth perhaps would feel as he did; Ruth, remembering how the mother of Ives behaved on an occasion of the past, might refuse his proposition and raise no obstacle between Pomeroy and his just punishment. But this suspicion vanished; he knew her too well for that; and too well he knew all that she felt for Pomeroy. No, the enterprise was safe enough. Ruth would never let the man go to prison if she could prevent it. She would give herself to Northmore rather—a very willing sacrifice. Herein lay the sting of his intention. The word sacrifice ran in his head and maddened him. He spurred his horse and galloped hard to distract his thoughts.

It was still early when he reached Tavistock, and Ruth showed much surprise at his appearance. He asked for a few minutes of private conversation, and she was able to grant them. They occupied a little public parlour behind the shop, where visitors drank tea. The place was secluded and empty. Ruth lighted the fire while she listened, and, as she nursed the flame, knew not that she tended the altar of a great self-renunciation. The man wasted no words, but silences fell between his sentences, and his speeches stood out naked, punctuated only by the crackling of the fire on the hearth.

"You know I've had a bit of bad luck at Stone Park?"

"Yes, indeed; 'twas in the paper. I'm very sorry about it."

"Good money gone and valuable beasts that money won't buy again. A devilish bit of work to burn poor unconscious creatures—eh?"

"So bad that I can't think anybody would have done it. 'Tis an unfortunate accident."

"I wish it had been. At least I won't say that, since it's a lie. I'm not sorry for what has fallen out, Ruth, because we always like to be proved right, and this proves me terribly right."

"I don't understand."

"You've got to understand. Hear the facts and then do what you please. This brings all to a climax. You've got to choose. I'm sorry for you in a way, and yet I'm not, for I do believe the Lord's behind it. Perhaps all happened because the Lord loves you—you, Ruth. Anyway, you're not the first woman whose hand has been forced by Providence."

She stared at these whirling words and uneasily remembered recent rumours that Northmore was not as steady as of old. She looked at him, but said nothing. He was pale and perspiring. His eyes shone brightly and his words jostled as they tumbled from him.

"The man who has done this infernal thing is Ives Pomeroy. Don't shake your head; don't laugh, for God's sake! It's no laughing matter."

"I do laugh," she said. "I laugh out loud, because I know that you have been fooled, or are fooling yourself. I would sooner believe that any man on Dartmoor had done it. I would sooner believe your own hand had done it. Never —never! Even you, who hate him, should know him far better than that."

"I would not believe it at first. I argued against it heart and soul, even in face of facts, but it's true enough, Ruth."

"Never! not if an angel said so."

"It had to be proved to me; and it must be proved to you. Then I've got to ask a question. I'm only a human being. I can't face a thing like this and suck no good out of it. He did it, and by an accident the still larger harm that he had planned was prevented."

"You're bewitched to think any such thing."

"Be just to others as well as generous to him. Remember his past and what he did long ago. His mother wasn't blind. His mother knew the meaning of proofs when she saw them."

"You'll never convince me of such an impossible thing, Matthew Northmore."

"So be it," he answered. "Then you must convince me that I'm wrong. If I can't prove he burnt my ricks and cattle, 'tis for you to show

that he didn't. Listen to me first, and if I don't tell you the truth, explain to me what the truth is. You know the man has threatened loudly and wickedly here and there. Many have heard him. I rebuked him harshly enough when he came to me with your name on his tongue; and he never forgave me for it. To such natures the truth is a stinging plaster and makes them run mad. He threatened all the evil he could think of, you know that."

"Loud, silly talk, yes. Vain as air, and light as air. He meant not a syllable of it."

"Didn't he? On the morning of the fire he rode past Stone Park going up to the peatworks at Amicombe Hill. He knew that I was away, and told Emmanuel Codd that he knew it. Then he went off. 'Twas he that raised the alarm, remember, on the night of the fire."

"What more could he do?"

"He could light the flames before he set to work to put 'em out. And that's what he did do. Look now. These things I myself found under a second hayrick some way from the first. With my own eyes I found them. What should you judge that was?"

He took a pasteboard box from his pocket and opened it. Then he held up a wisp of grey, half-burned paper.

"'Tis a piece of paper that's been set on fire and then gone out."

"Exactly! That's what it is, a piece of writing-paper with writing on it. A letter, in fact."

"Yes."

"Look at it."

He handed the note to Ruth and she glanced down and saw her own words.

"You didn't think he'd use one of your letters to set fire to my hay, Ruth?"

She made no answer, and he brought out a second paper.

"A bill," he said, "a bill—money due from Ives Pomeroy for guano. That I found along with the other—half burnt too."

"What more?" she asked.

"D'you want more?"

"A scrap of paper isn't sufficient to condemn a man, surely? This may have happened in a thousand ways."

"It's proof positive, Ruth; and you know it. But here's more yet."

He handed her a matchbox.

"Whose is that?"

"I gave it him years ago. I know he uses it."

"Yes—he uses it."

Northmore said no more and waited a long time for Ruth to speak. The fire crackled; the girl's hand itched to add new fuel to the flame.

"Be just to me," said Matthew at last. "You are always just. You have reproved me sometimes for persecuting you. But be just to-day. There are only three people in the world who know this thing—you and me and Ives Pomeroy. None else need ever know it."

"Why do you come to me with this?" she asked fiercely; but she knew the reason.

"Because I must take my last chance on the flood tide. I come to you with this because I want you—with my heart and soul and strength I want you. I shall die before long if I don't have you. You've got the fate of two men in your hand, and now you must act. You've hinted that I've bullied you sometimes; and so did

Pomeroy say so. Never—never till now; but now—well, call it what you please. I'm not proud any more. I'm only starving, and a bit mad perhaps, as starving people will be. You must marry me, Ruth, and in a very little time you'll bless the chance that has made you do it. I see the future crystal clear. Speak, then. If Pomeroy's to go to prison, say so. If he's to be free, say so. I'm cruel, I know that; but I'm cruel to be kind."

She stood and stared, and grew very white.

"I mean it," he continued. "Don't think I'm speaking rashly. I've fought with God A'mighty's own Self for a long night over this. I'm right; I'm doing the will of Heaven. I know, as well as I know anything, that the man's to have another chance and that you're going to give it to him. That's all that stands between him and penal servitude; there, under your hand—the letter you wrote him, the matchbox you gave him. Did Providence let me find this out for nothing? Be my wife and let him go free to justify his days and fulfil his mother's prayers. If not—but you'll not go back now. To be true to him is to be true to me, Ruth; to be false to him . . . Yes, I know 'twill be your love for him will make you take me; but I'll suffer even that torture, because I'll look forward."

"You've planned this, Matthew?"

"Fate planned it. God Almighty planned it. Don't decide until the full meaning and force of the thing is made clear to your mind. Don't do anything in a hurry and repent later. I've waited long enough; God knows I can wait a bit more yet."

His voice was hard and no love rang in it. She

knew that he was in reality despising himself, taking little joy in this necessary scene, and looking on feverishly to the time when it should be behind them both. But she also saw that he had not hurried to these conclusions; that he had slowly and steadily driven honour and justice out of his heart; that nothing she could now say or do would shake him from his purpose.

Ruth endeavoured to estimate the position, and first she occupied herself with Ives. She knew his enmity towards Northmore. She remembered in the past that nothing but the unexpected ever happened where Pomeroy was concerned; she recollected that when he seemed most strongly bent for right, his mother always feared for him. She judged the evidence and concluded with herself that Ives was guilty. Moved by steady hate against Northmore, he had thus basely struck.

She strove frantically to avoid decision; but she could not. Pomeroy had done terrible wrong, and it remained with her to determine who should suffer for his crime.

Northmore neither broke in upon her silence nor watched her trembling features. He guessed very accurately at the nature of her thoughts and let her fight out the battle alone. He was hopeful, but he did not show his hope. The proofs lay under her hands; the fire burnt behind her; but he made no effort to relieve her of the obvious temptation. He knew her well enough to feel no fear.

She rose at last and walked up and down for a time; but the letter and matchbox seemed to act as a magnet, to draw her eyes, and excite her fingers. Then the fascination of the proofs

mastered her and she permitted them to exist no more. Before he could lift his hand, Ruth had taken the things and thrown them into the fire.

Still he trusted, because none had ever known her to act falsely.

"You understand what that means, Ruth?"

"Yes," she answered, "I understand."

He uttered an inarticulate sound, almost like a cock crowing. Triumph pealed through it. He strode to her and caught her in his arms. He could scarcely speak, but seemed to be incoherently praying. She hardly heard him and was very thankful when he left her. He gave a lad who had been holding his horse half-a-crown; and the little boy, after recovering from his amazement, studied the pastrycook's window, as one who has suddenly inherited wealth studies anew the face of the world and finds it changed.

Throughout that day at intervals, like a bell tolling, there came to her the knowledge of what she had done. Her thought was related to the incident as a mind is related to the shock of sudden death or misfortune. It beats in upon the brain by fits and starts, as a new thing, at every waking hour. It flashes upon us in all its novel horror, not once, but a thousand times. Many days, many months, must pass before the evil becomes accepted and received as a permanent part of our load; for memory rolls in a tide of successive waves, and impressions are built up slowly, not stamped at a blow. Were it otherwise, the world could not contain its full weight of grief and keep sane.

CHAPTER XL

SACRED GROUND

WHILE RUTH found the significance of her conduct begin slowly to stamp itself into her spirit and paint the future, Pomeroy also went through something of a crisis, and his brooding darkness again lifted and gave place to a phase of calm hope and decision.

Moved by unrest on the day that Northmore rode to Tavistock, angered at the farmer's cold attitude, at Codd's conduct, and at the world in general, Ives took himself and his thoughts from work, and wandered before a great west wind that drove him upward into the desolation. He was unsettled every way, and now, surveying the theatre of his life from King Tor, he despised it and despised himself for stopping in it. With his eyes watering from the force of the gale, he looked upon a world of dead heather and grey stones hugely scattered from the heights to the vales below; and he looked up at a sky blown quite clear save for cumuli on the horizon. Like mighty ships the distant masses sailed, and in their precipices was darkness and on their crowns was light.

The man gazed down and perceived the whole of his little world spread beneath him. For a

time its diminutive size impressed him forcibly and almost drove him to shame. He told himself that he had never realised its circumscriptions until that hour.

All lay between the crockets of Sampford Spiney church, rising above their proper garland of tree-tops to the south, and Great Mis, where it ascended northerly. Within these boundaries, under the jagged horizons of the Moor, his thirty years of life had passed; and the scene had not been too small to ripen him into a man; and the life had not been tame enough to leave his forehead unwrinkled or his mind unstored with good and evil. Every peak and dingle, every acre of reclaimed earth, every forest that flamed and scattered its last foliage on the fierce wind, was known to him. The fields were his familiars; each possessed its own characteristics, its virtues and defects. All the important incidents of his life were embraced by this abode of natural forces; here his days had moved through the pageant of the seasons and the passage of the years.

Pomeroy felt a sort of humiliation to remember that he had never passed from these pitiful precincts into the bourn of the world beyond; that the actions and activities of thirty years had revolved about yonder grey smudge under Vixen Tor, the place of his birth. A great sense of the revolting smallness of existence sickened him, and he lifted a frown to the dim wonder of the world beyond.

Then suddenly, even upon this moment of darkest impatience, like the sun through a cloud, there awakened light and sweetness and harmony of new thoughts. The poetry of things that were past touched his spirit, for of late days the loveli-

ness of his mother's life had dimly gleamed for him, and he dwelt upon it after a fashion that was not possible until time had rolled between his heart and the agony of her death.

He looked down now, and the valley was all changed. There woke in him a proud defiant joy to be here and nowhere else; because he was regarding the quiet places of his mother's life; her home and the hamlet wherein she had dwelt; the little heath-tracks and footpaths her feet had trodden; the cottage doors that her presence had entered. These low grey roofs were blessed for ever, because her head had been under them; this was the valley that must shine for him brighter than any star of dawn or evening, because she lived and laboured in it—lived and laboured for him—and loved him ceaselessly, from the first hour of his life until the last hour of her own. Here had passed her gracious days within a narrower radius far than his; here she had suffered and here she had shone, like a beacon-fire, to lead sad spirits towards wisdom, to warm cold hearts with her ready sympathy.

Now this grey valley and the crying wind that scoured it; the river's thread; the mournful, naked roads, so straight and stern; the little habitations and the passionless amphitheatre of stone that contained all, were translated for Ives and grew precious above any kingdom of earth or heaven. The home that had held his mother would never be mean to him. Only the great west wind could sing her song; only this stern lodgment of granite and wild sky and silence was worthy to make a trysting-place for her high heart. The things that he saw were not small any longer. Themselves nothing to the

man, to the son they were exalted by his mother's goodness and contentment, her loving-kindness and wide patience with all life.

He gazed upon sacred ground. He began to think upon her, and there followed the customary advantage to himself. From her memory he passed to the things that were good to her, and her wishes and her hopes. Far off he saw a horseman riding down into Merivale, but at that distance he could not recognise him. Only when this rider left the road and proceeded towards Stone Park did he know that it was Northmore. It darkened his mind to reflect upon Matthew, but he dismissed him and thought of Ruth.

Ives decided that he would ask her to marry him that night. He rejoiced in her suddenly. It seemed that much of her natural beauty and charm had evaded him as a younger man. He remembered how his mother chid him when he had told her in the past that he could see nothing to admire about Ruth.

He leapt down off King Tor and went home and prepared to go into Tavistock at nightfall. Then he changed his mind and postponed the event until a subsequent day, when the shops closed early.

Morning found him furious to see Ruth. He woke longing, above all other deeds, to kiss her. He could not wait until the early-closing day came. He could not wait at all. He made a swift breakfast and set off to Tavistock before nine o'clock.

He found Ruth ill.

She was in the shop when he entered and could not leave it. Therefore he offered her marriage over the counter.

He was first concerned for her pallor, and she explained it by a sleepless night. Then he spoke of trifling things, yet struck one small matter very near her heart.

"What'll you say? I've lost your matchbox, Ruth. 'Twas my greatest treasure, and now 'tis gone, and I shan't be happy till you've given me another. I thought as I'd left it up at Amicombe Hill, and rode up to see; but I couldn't find it where I was at the works."

She stared at him, and he caught her doing so.

"Forgive me," he said, "and get me another. But ban't about that I've come. D'you know, Ruth, I seemed awful near my mother yesterday. I was up over on King Tor looking down, and I could have sworn that she was at my elbow somehow. Never knowed such a feeling come over me since she was taken. And you was woven into it, if you can understand. From that moment I've felt a craving to see you and—and . . . And then this morning, after I'd somehow looked upon it as done, I asked myself how I could dare to have the cheek to hope for it. But you know that cheek was always my strong point. With other girls that is, not with you. I never felt to you the same as to them—not so easy and friendly. It came awful slow and sure, Ruth, and that's my excuse for never having offered myself before, though I've been on the edge of it scores of dozens of times. But 'twas a growing thing—growed while I never knew it growed—growed and growed while my dear was dying—growed on and on after, till somehow . . ."

He stopped a moment and she stood with her head bent. She did not speak. She was struggling to retain consciousness.

"Looking back, Ruth, 'tis amazing to me I could have lived in the same house with you and not been mad for you waking and sleeping. God knows I felt everything about you was sweet and comely and lovely and too good for me. But mother wanted for us to marry, and such a cranky dog I was that just because I knew that . . . and yet not quite that neither. I was in love with you afore even them days. I falled in love with you first for your laugh. 'Tis a very soft, dear little laugh—like a mother moor-hen calling to her chicks. And—then—but how can a crack-brained man like me go over all them years? I only know where I've stood of late and where I stand now. Maybe it's too late to dare to offer myself, Ruth; but God judge me if I'm not in earnest; and I'll be the best husband I know how to be. Not much of a man for such a maid as you—but . . ."

He bent across and took her hand. She looked at him and tried to speak but could not. A moment later she sank away from him and fell in a heap.

He shouted aloud, and, finding no other way, climbed over the counter to the detriment of the cakes displayed upon it. Ruth had fainted. She recovered quickly, however, and Ives, in some dismay, went off to the nearest public-house and quickly returned with brandy.

She drank it and thanked him.

"'Twas the shock," she explained to the shop-keeper. "He told me something I didn't expect, Mrs. Foster. But I'm all right again now. Come back presently, Ives."

Pomeroy went off and did not return for an hour. To him it was the longest hour that he had

ever spent, and during its progress he suffered considerably. Something had gone amiss—that much he clearly saw. For the rest he was in the dark.

She waited for him when he returned, and together they went out beside the river and walked under great trees there.

"Forgive me for making such a show of myself, Ives, but 'twas the sudden shock coming just now. I'm very fond of you, Ives, and always shall be, and I'm proud to think you'd care to marry me; but 'tis too late for that. I'm going to marry Matthew Northmore."

"Northmore! Good God A'mighty, you can't! What! after all these years? Don't you hate the man? Right well you know it!"

"No, I don't. I can't hate such love as he's got for me. It's better than I deserve, whatever shape it takes. He's been faithful, Ives; and he's strong; and he's won. Such as I am, he's won me, and marry him I will."

Pomeroy would not hear of this. He protested, stormed, and swore. He demanded reasons from Ruth, but she would say nothing definite.

"He's too strong for me," she repeated. "'Tis vain, dear Ives, speaking against the man like this and saying evil things against him. He's no enemy to you. Believe that."

"You're not honest in this business," he answered. "Would he dare to offer himself again, after all he knows, if you hadn't invited him to do it? You've played with him and broke his heart and driven him to drink, and now, when the man's sunk miles from his former manhood, you take him. But you shan't—you shan't marry Northmore—not while I've got a shot-gun. If I ban't worth a thought—well, I say nothing

against that. I'm a useless, worthless pattern of man—not good enough for a woman like you. But you shan't marry him—that I will swear. I'll save you from that if I swing for it. D'you think I'm a born fool? D'you think I don't see very clear that there's a lot more behind this than my mind can fathom? I'll go to him, then, and I'll strangle the truth out of him if there's no other way to get at it."

"Don't do that, Ives. Nothing can be gained by more wickedness. He and I understand each other. I am doing what I believe to be right. Have pity upon a woman, and don't . . ."

"To hell with the whole pack of you!" he roared out. "'Twas thus with t'other, and now 'tis thus with you. I'll finish with all of you, for not one has ever been anything to me but an unrestful plague. Never again—never—so help me God—will I touch a woman. And answer me that man shall; and the more you pray for him, the more I'll drag it out of him! He's won you with some damned lie. He's no fair fighter—no drunkard ever is. But I'll get to the bottom of this before I've done with it; and you shan't marry him while I'm alive. I'd rather cut your throat with my own hand than suffer it."

He left her ghastly white—standing shivering under the trees. Then he set off homeward. But the accident of passing a railway station changed all his purpose in a flash. This catastrophe upset his equilibrium and, by some inward cataclysm, heaved up another common hunger of his nature to the top. He longed for women in the same moment that he cursed them. His spirit had gone sour under this storm, and he was full of passion turned to poison. He took train at

Tavistock, went down to Plymouth, and spent two days there. Then he returned home exhausted in body, but fortified in mind. His brains were clear again, and he perceived that some great unknown event must have brought about Ruth's action. What had Northmore done to change her? Nothing that he could conceive was too bad for the master of Stone Park now. He planned a thousand crushing counterstrokes; and then some dawn of reason began to touch the chaos of his mind. His long rages weakened; the futility of this great relapse impressed itself upon his soul. He decided to hear Northmore. These reflections came with his return home on the third night after Ruth had refused him. He woke refreshed in body, but it was his mind that now suffered a retrogression. He doubted why Northmore should be allowed to speak. He longed to be at the man's throat; he felt that Matthew must yet battle for this woman before he won her.

And elsewhere Ruth considered the story from its beginnings, saw herself gradually waking to the purpose of Ives, watched herself waiting for him to speak the longed-for word, and then perceived how upon this dream, even at the moment of fulfilment, had come the horror of the fall of Pomeroy and the attitude of his wronged rival. For her the matter was ended, and she could not take back her word. She accepted the sacrifice for the precious fruits of it; and she trusted that with passage of time Ives would return to himself, repent his wickedness, and find all that his mother had hoped and desired for him in another heart than hers. Through long nights she suffered, and her agony heaped years upon her head and stamped care in her eyes for ever.

CHAPTER XLI

ENGAGEMENTS

TWO DAYS AFTER the return of Ives, certain persons met at the bar of the Jolly Huntsmen, and Peter Toop announced his approaching marriage.

Moleskin and Rupert Johnson were of the party; Emmanuel Codd sat in a corner; other men crowded the bar, and both Peter and Joel stood behind the counter.

Mr. Peter cast glances towards the door and then, evidently labouring under some nervousness, spoke as Matthew Northmore entered.

"Was waiting for you, farmer, afore I broke a bit of news. Even Joel don't know it yet. I've kept it for my friends to-night."

"'Twill mean free drinks, I hope," said Moleskin.

"In a word, souls, I be going to follow a good example. Here's Matthew here tokened at last, after most faithful conduct, I'm sure; and Moleskin's daughter have taken Johnson; and there's marryings in the air to right and left beside; so why not I? And Nature was for it and the woman was willing; and so 'tis done; I'm taking her in the early spring."

"Bet you a dollar I know her name, Peter," said Mr. Cawker.

"Very like. I ban't the sort to hide my doings under a bushel, Cawker. To be plain, 'tis Mrs. Jill Bolt, widow of the late Samuel."

"A fine, red, recommendable sort of girl," said Moleskin. "She haven't had much luck so far, but she's drawn a prize at last, and no mistake! She've got a temper, however, if colour counts. Your hair is taken from the evil to come, Peter; but you'll have to look sharp after your beard. Good luck and long life to you both!"

The company expressed gratification. Some were coarse, but all were kind.

"And you, Joel?" asked his brother. "What do you say?"

Joel was clearly ill pleased with this news.

"I hope 'twill prove better than it looks," he answered.

Peter flushed; his jaw dropped and he stroked his beard.

"I didn't expect that," he said.

"What good be a fiery young woman like that to you? She've only taken you for your money!"

"He's jealous! He's jealous," cried Codd. "Look at his eyes—I lay he wanted her hisself!"

"Not I. When I marry, 'twill be something that belongs to my own generation, not a giglet wench to bring my grey hairs to the grave. And this I'll say: I warn you, Peter, I go out of this house the day that woman comes in."

Peter panted, and his eyes flashed from behind their glasses.

"Think better of that," he said. "Don't wait for her: go to-morrow—go to-night, if you like. For a brother to say these things! 'Tis not to be borne!"

The old men glared into each other's faces; then Joel left the bar.

Peter wiped his forehead and shook his head.

"Too bad, too bad!" he murmured. "If he'd found somebody to take him and his rheumatism, I'd have been the first to stand up and say, 'Well done!' But 'tis always the same with that man, though my brother. A very cross-grained disposition when other folks' good fortune be the matter. And what have I done, or the woman either, to make him get niffed like this?"

"Jealousy for certain," declared Johnson. "Perhaps he'd thought of her too and was going to ask her. But meantime you'd dashed in and won."

"Well, there it is," said Peter as he took snuff freely. "I won't pretend I don't feel Joel's view of the case. Still, the rest of you seem pretty pleased about it, and I'm sure the woman is—if words count for anything. Well, what's it to be?"

"Bottles of wine!" cried Moleskin. "'Tis the very night for it. Two bottles of your thick black port, and six pennyworth of old brandy poured in to lift it up! That's the tipple to drink to you and your lady."

They drank and grew excited. The talk ranged to Northmore, and he too was toasted. His forthcoming marriage had set many tongues wagging, and the temporary disappearance of Pomeroy was associated with it.

Now Peter spoke of the matter.

"For my part, when I heard of your great deed, and that our Ruth had come round, my first thought was pleasure that you and me should become relations by marriage. You'll make as

good a husband as I shall, Matthew. But next I turned my mind on young Pomeroy, because his mother, afore she went home, was very much set on them two being man and wife. Have you seen him since the news was out?"

"I haven't."

"There may be more reasons than one for his going off," declared Emmanuel. "For my part, 'twouldn't surprise me if he didn't come back afore he's fetched."

The old man caught his master's grim stare and was silent. Of late Codd, much angered to find that nothing was done against Pomeroy, had tried to force Northmore's hand so far as he dared. The position confused him and he could not understand it.

"Be off, Codd," said Matthew pointedly. "I'll speak to you presently. The name of Pomeroy's been in your mouth rather too much of late, and I should like to know why. Get on the way home and I'll follow you in five minutes."

Codd rose, both frightened and angry. His plot seemed likely to miscarry and his own position was difficult. Emmanuel could not make Northmore proceed against Ives without defeating his own object: because he was supposed to know nothing about the papers and the matchbox. He determined to see Jill as soon as possible.

Now he departed and Moleskin criticised him unfavourably.

"I wish you'd never took on that old dog," he said to Northmore. "There's not a man in Merivale—let alone the women—that hasn't had to suffer evil from his tongue. I wonder we

haven't risen in a rally and taken him down to the river and tried to wash his beastly old mind a thought cleaner afore now."

Moleskin emptied his glass and departed, leaving behind him a fine ethical problem for the company to solve.

"Why should that chap's wife and daughter come near to starving so long as he was straight, and find themselves easy and comfortable again now he'm at his old games?" asked Peter. "The moment he lapsed from righteousness, things began to brighten up for his women. That's wrong, surely!"

They were still arguing when Ives Pomeroy suddenly appeared.

Peter began to chide him amiably, but he stopped, for the new-comer was not in a mood for pleasantries. He accosted Northmore harshly before the people.

"I've just been over to your house and they said you was out. So I thought I might meet you here."

Northmore was no actor, and he found it difficult to face the other without emotion, for this sudden meeting surprised him. He had heard from Ruth how Ives went to see her, but she gave no details of their meeting and was indeed insistent on one subject alone. "He'll want to get the rights of this out of you," she told Matthew; "but he mustn't. Never, never let him hear that I know what he did." And Northmore had promised it. He had gone further and undertaken that Pomeroy should hear nothing of the discovery at Stone Park; but here he reckoned on very faulty knowledge of his own; and now, as the other stood before him, haggard,

stern, and ferocious, Matthew began to perceive the real difficulties ahead. He firmly believed that Pomeroy was guilty, and the conviction now buoyed him up. That this man, under any pretext, could have the effrontery to beard him thus, after his crimes of the recent past, stung Northmore to the necessary pitch of anger.

"My business is with you, but anybody may hear it," continued Ives. "Ruth Rendle tells me that you and she are going to be married."

"Yes; she's consented at last. You weren't in a hurry to wish me joy."

"Did she tell you why I went to see her and what happened?"

"I wasn't interested."

"But you would have been. I went to ask her to marry me, Matthew Northmore."

Northmore only stared and made no answer.

"A day behind the fair, Ives," said Mr. Toop cautiously.

"And she told me that she was going to marry you."

"Of course. What then?"

"Then she fainted," said Ives shortly. "That's what happened then."

"Your bluster and noise, I suppose."

"Don't face me like this!" thundered the other. "I want the stark truth out of you, and I'll have it! Why has she changed her mind? Tell me that."

"How d'you know she has changed?"

"Know it? Hasn't your name made her grow thin? Hasn't your plaguing worn her out? Didn't she leave here to try and get away from you?"

"You've no right or sense in all this," answered

Northmore. "You're mad to behave so, or ask such a question."

"Am I mad? Then why did she faint? Tell me that. I'm not going to be fobbed off with less than truth. That girl could do nought crooked or false, and not a word could I get out of her. But you're different. I want to know what she's took you for, after hating the sight of you for five years. And that's what you've got to tell me."

"Have I?"

"Who be you to ax men their secrets?" inquired an enemy of Ives.

"If there is a secret, 'tis a vile one, as any can see," answered Pomeroy, turning on him. "This man has forced her to cave in and say she'll marry him. He's tormented her into it. And how was it done? 'Tisn't because she won't take me that I want to know, for I'm not good enough for her and never was. But I understand her ten thousand times better than him, and I know she'd never have took him unless 'twas for some terrible purpose."

None spoke, and Ives turned on Matthew.

"You've made her do this against her nature," he said; "you've driven her into it out of your own hunger to have her; you've . . ."

But Northmore silenced him by a louder sound and raised a din by beating at the side of the counter with his stick. He was pale and furious. His self-control had departed.

"Be silent, you hypocrite! You—you of all men—to dare to speak to me like this."

"Of all men I should be the one."

"You're a fool for your pains, then."

"Perhaps I may be; but I'll have something more still for my pains, if I've got to tear it

out of you with my naked hands. Answer you shall!"

Northmore grew calmer again and calculated the results if Pomeroy heard the truth.

A great silence had fallen upon the company during this duel, and now Peter took it upon him to end the scene.

"I must ask you two to stop, please," he said. "No politics, and no quarrels, and no drunkenness has always been the rule here. If you've come to drink, Pomeroy, do so; but I won't have any more words."

"Leave it," advised an old man. "This row ban't none of our business and we don't want to hear no more. A thousand pities you'm not ten year younger, Matthew. If you was, the pair of you could have it out in the good old way, with your mauleys, and give us a bit of sport."

Northmore spoke.

"We'll finish this alone. I'm engaged to-morrow, but the next day when you will. We can meet on the Moor."

Pomeroy went over to him and spoke privately.

"The Lone Stones, then—the evening after to-morrow."

"As you please."

"And the truth, or God's my judge——"

"You'll find the truth bitter, as men of your stamp must."

For the moment, regardless of consequences or his promise to Ruth, Northmore had determined to tell Pomeroy what he knew against him. He was in no mood to argue with himself, or to ask himself what would be the other's attitude on learning that his crime was no secret. But the Lone Stones had struck coldly on Matthew's ear

and silenced him more effectively than mention of any other spot on earth.

Yet Pomeroy, when he named the Lone Stones, thought only of their remoteness from all human life and human interference. It was a good place to knock a man on the head, or to be knocked on the head if fortune fell contrary.

CHAPTER XLII

THE REVELATION

EMMANUEL CODD persisted in his resolution to see Jill, and walked to Sampford Spiney on the following day that he might do so. His master had gone to see a lawyer at Tavistock and the coast was clear. Jill's marriage would take place after Christmas, and she had little leisure to devote to lesser matters; but Codd interested her. They walked out while he told of what had happened, and she explained the things that Emmanuel had not fathomed.

"In a proper fury of rage he was," said the man. "So I hear to-day. He came in the bar, after I'd left it, and every man thought he was going to fly at Northmore's throat. Yet Northmore holds off. Why don't he put Pomeroy in prison?"

Jill laughed. She was a sort of spirit that treats the world reciprocally. Her coming good fortune had softened her heart.

"Can't you see what's happened? I can. Northmore thinks that Pomeroy burnt his property, and that puts Pomeroy in his power. So off he goes to Ruth Rendle instead of a policeman."

"Why for should he?"

"Because she's all the world to him, and Ives

Pomeroy is all the world to her. They were tokened. He told me so himself. 'Twas a choice between trouble for Pomeroy and trouble for Ruth. Any man in Northmore's fix would have done the same. He's got her on the strength of that fire. So you hit Pomeroy harder even than you hoped. And helped your master too. You ought to be very well satisfied."

"I don't see I've hurt Pomeroy, however."

"Why—good Lord!—you've robbed him of the girl he was going to marry!"

"A girl! What's one girl more than another to him? He'll rage a bit and then find a dozen more. I want to know that he's picking oakum and got the broad arrow on his back."

Jill, from her standpoint of coming prosperity, looked at Mr. Codd and disliked him. A revulsion of circumstance had brought with it large modifications of mind. Emmanuel's attitude, reasonable a week ago, now appeared disgraceful in her eyes. Light and hope had leavened the adamant of her heart in one direction; and now they made it hard where before it had been soft. Her sympathy with Emmanuel's grievances vanished, and in its place was wakened a shadowy tenderness towards old enemies. Her mind played delicately with vanished years, while her mood ignored the intermediate period. She remembered her maiden days and love-making with young Ives; she dreamed of that springtime gone by, when he carried her across the river and kissed her half-way over. All animosity had died under a sensuous comfort of spirit begotten by good fortune. She often imagined herself in the bar of the Jolly Huntsmen alone with Ives—talking to him across the counter

and giving of the best that her husband's bottles held.

In this spirit Mr. Codd found Jill of little consolation. First he was angered at her attitude and sneered at the change in her views; then she repaid with interest, and he became alarmed.

"I hate your poisonous mind," she said. "Not done enough! You've done a deal too much, and I'm not on your side no more. For two pins I'd put this right."

"You talk as if you was straight yourself!" he burst out. "Better you look back a bit before you preach to me. Who was it put me up to . . . ?"

"The devil," said Jill, "and well you know it. Don't you dare to say I had any hand in this, because if you do, I'll go straight and make Peter Toop have you up to Tavistock for telling lies about me. I don't know anything whatever about it—not a shadow. You can't hurt a finger-nail of mine—I took very good care of that. And the less we hear of one another in future the better—for you."

She left him irresolute and alarmed. He forgot Pomeroy and began to be seriously concerned for himself. He was ignorant and took her threats very much in earnest. He asked himself what she might do, but he could not estimate her power. The uncertainty of her attitude made him frightened and threw him into a furious rage with her.

Meanwhile Jill Bolt also reflected long and deeply upon the situation. All was very clear to her. Again and again she broke the thread of thought to wander through vanished days with Pomeroy. The pictures ended in sighs. That

aspect of human relations had failed her. Fate had decided that she should never enjoy a man worth having ; but, instead, a rich husband was to be her lot. Peter would probably wear better; but "God send he don't wear too long," thought Jill.

She awoke into a perfectly honest regret for Pomeroy. She could not wed him; but she found herself large-minded before the spectacle of his disappointment. Jill was much pleased with herself upon feeling these generous emotions, because she doubted not that they argued a good heart and a kindly disposition. For Northmore she cared not a straw, but she felt that he was marrying Ruth under false pretences and that the plot to punish Ives had gravely miscarried. She was exceedingly glad now to feel that it had done so. She told herself that she had come to her senses and that, in any event, she would never have allowed Ives Pomeroy to go to prison. She was again surprised and gratified to find how much virtue inhabited her soul. She pictured Pomeroy thanking her for giving Ruth back to him. These dreams were very agreeable, but between them and the present moment lay hard realities.

Jill determined to see Matthew Northmore before that day was done; and after nightfall she walked through Merivale to Stone Park.

A woman let her in, and Northmore received her with the air of somewhat boisterous heartiness that he now affected. He was pressing preparations for his marriage, and had arranged for its celebration in a month's time.

"Well, Mrs. Bolt; but I must call you 'Jill' in future, for we shall be relations in a sort of way before long!"

He sat at a table littered with accounts and papers. He was preparing to transfer most of his possessions into the name of his future wife. A small oil lamp burnt on the table, and the fire had sunk low. Now he mended it.

At the door a man was listening, in the classic manner, at the keyhole. Northmore's new serving woman had told Emmanuel who was the visitor and thrown him into a very violent excitement. He felt that his own position was involved, perhaps even his own freedom. Therefore he listened until he had heard enough to assure him of his worst fears.

"Come to the fire," said Matthew. "Lucky I hadn't gone down to the Jolly Huntsmen for a yarn and a glass to-night. The lawyers have regularly muddled my brains, I assure you."

Jill looked at him, as he stretched his legs to the fire and yawned. She marked the exaggerated manner so foreign to him. He seemed as one who pretended that all was well with his world, yet knew the opposite.

"Sorry I haven't come about anything pleasant," said the visitor—"quite the contrary, in fact."

At a distance the thought of Northmore's sufferings had not troubled Jill; but now, in the moment when she was about to inflict them, she felt all that this must mean to him. She plunged into the matter swiftly.

"I've done wrong, and you've got to know it."

"Why, Jill? Why should I? Don't bother me with your sins, there's a good girl. I've got plenty of my own to bother about, I assure you. But this isn't the moment. We're both going to be married. Let's try and grasp at a bit of happiness, if we can."

"I know how you feel. I'm like that too. I'm frightened at the chance of losing it all. I wake in a cold sweat of a night sometimes from dreaming that Peter's changed his mind about me."

"No fear of that."

There was a moment of silence; then Jill spoke out.

"You hate Ives Pomeroy, don't you?"

"No," he said. "I can call God to witness that I don't. I'm very sorry for him in more ways than anybody knows, or ever will. He's got a terrible deal on his conscience, poor chap, and 'tis small wonder that he's wild and savage and furious. But only one thing matters now, and that is that Ruth Rendle is going to marry me instead of him."

"Don't deceive yourself," said Jill. "That woman loves Pomeroy a million times better than she likes you."

He started and stared. Her curious eyes were fixed on him; the light seemed to set her hair on fire. It burnt in little ragged flames about her ears and over her forehead. She took off her hat and put it on her lap. Then, having pushed back her hair, she donned her black hat again.

"What are you saying?" he asked harshly.

"'Tis like this, Matthew Northmore. Pomeroy made three people hate him: you and me and Emmanuel Codd. I hated him because he wouldn't come back to my apern-strings after Samuel died; and Codd hated him over money; and you hated him for your own reasons."

"And he hated me."

"Only noise and bluster. He ban't built for steady patient hating, or steady patient loving either. But that's not here or there. In my

rage I met Emmanuel Codd, and when he told me that he was going to be level with Pomeroy, I said nothing against it. 'Twas Emmanuel Codd burnt your ricks and your stock: that's what's on my conscience to tell you. He confessed that he was going to do it to me, and my sin was that I kept it hid. He planned all—to make you think that Pomeroy had done it. But whether you do think so or not ban't my business. I only want to cleanse my soul of this, so as by no wicked chance I should let you suspect an honest man. Pomeroy's done many silly things and said many more; but he had no hand in that job. And if you like to call your man, I'll face him with this now on the spot."

Northmore as yet quite failed to digest the significance of all he heard. He rose mechanically and went to the door; then he stopped and turned.

"Never mind him," he said. "This means the end of him. You say that Codd planned the fire; but the papers—Pomeroy's papers that I found?"

"That was where the devil helped," said Jill calmly. "Ives came here the day of the fire, because he knew that you were out of the way, to speak to Codd. Then Codd put him in a rage and he flung off and galloped away, and never thought to put back some papers and things he'd taken out of his pocket. The rest is easy to be seen. 'Twas put into Codd's head to plant the fire on Pomeroy for your eyes to find alone."

In this most lucid explanation Jill made but one error, and that intentional. Then she rose to depart.

"Of course, whether you found Pomeroy's

papers or not, I don't know. But, so far as I'm concerned, I only tell you what Codd told me, and I ask you to forgive me for keeping it from you. I know 'twas wicked and cowardly and mean. But 'twas done out of hate of Ives Pomeroy, not from any ill-will to you. I didn't care a button about you one way or t'other then. Now I do care about you, and I've forgiven Pomeroy. So there it stands."

She rose, but he apparently had ceased to hear or perceive her. He was staring into the fire, and he had shrivelled up a little, as the thing began to be better understood and traced to its sequence. His hands were between his knees; his back was round; his chin had dropped, and the firelight flickered over his pale beard.

"Good night," said Jill. "I wish you'd forgive me for bottling this up. I don't want to be anything but friendly."

She waited at the door for him to answer, but he had grown oblivious to her presence and heard no word of the last utterance.

Jill went out and shut the door behind her, while Northmore remained motionless beside the fire. His reception of her news convinced Jill that she was right, and that she had quenched Northmore's shadowy hope of happiness for ever. Then she began to reflect. She looked into Stone Park kitchen and asked if Emmanuel were at home. A man and his wife sat there together.

"He was here a bit ago," answered the labourer. "Then he went up the passage-way; and then up to his chamber, I believe."

"I should like to see him," said the visitor.

But Emmanuel was not found in his room.

"Must have gone down to the public-house, I

suppose," suggested the woman, "though 'tis late for him to do so."

Jill departed, but at the gate she stopped and considered the situation from the standpoint of Mr. Codd. It was very likely that he had been listening, and had heard her confession. He could make no counter-attack, for it was he who had lighted the fire, and now his master knew it. It occurred to her that Codd might be lying hid beside her way in a mood not friendly. A man who could burn ricks and cattle would not hesitate, under provocation, to do worse.

The darkness was intense, and a thin rain blew in her face from the south. Jill decided not to go home by the road to Merivale. It was flanked by thorn-trees and boulders and gorse clumps, all well calculated to conceal a man. She smiled at the idea of Emmanuel waiting to brain her; then she took a wide circuit into the night, and trusted herself upon the gloomy bosom of the Staple Tors.

Left alone, Northmore, through the progress of many hours, watched his glittering palace of hope founder and fall. Not a ray of the many glimmering facets but went out; not a solitary rainbow gleam remained to haunt the ruin. Dust and ashes were his portion henceforth for ever.

The position admitted of statement so simple that even in his present disorder of mind he could see it clearly. Ives Pomeroy was innocent and Matthew had won Ruth with a lie. There could be no further shadow of justice in this engagement, and he must instantly release her. Even temptation to persist did not offer itself, because it would presently be common knowledge that Codd had committed the crime. Jill must tell others; the thing could not be hidden.

He struggled long and left no loophole of escape unexplored. Was it possible that Jill herself had lied, inspired thereto by Ruth? He clutched for a moment at the idea of a plot; but he dismissed it as vain. Jill had never associated his engagement with the business of the fire. Her sole concern had been to clear his mind of wrongful suspicions. He could not build on her conversation with him. It was purely destructive, and he assumed her innocent of any ulterior design. Thus nothing remained, because the whole edifice of his happiness had stood upon mistaken belief in another man's crime. The ruins were absolute.

He had paid ten pounds for Ruth's ring that morning; he had been planning his possessions for her all that day and had imagined her gratitude when he should tell her what he had done. These small circumstances stung his mind again and again. For a time they persisted along with the main tragedy and recurred at intervals, like some little pathetic treble melody running in a great fugue of mighty, sorrowful sounds.

But detail died out of his soul as the night yawned onwards toward morning. The trivial things that he had meant to do—the small surprises planned, the furniture, the recreation of Stone Park parlour, the pictures, the piano—all were swept away and swallowed at last. From the profundities of grief, his mind, as though suffocating, struggled to the surface again and once more occupied itself with lesser aspects of his loss. Then it plunged him into the last bitterness and decided his future action. He remembered that Ruth did not yet know these things; and he

wondered how he should tell her. Words were no vehicle for such tremendous intelligence. He would not speak; he would not write. A dreadful deed befitted such a dreadful fact. She should learn explicitly that she was free. There was nothing left for him but the dust, and he longed to return to it. Self-destruction remained as the only road to peace. For hours he dallied with that dusky shadow until the idea grew just, reasonable, and inevitable. To die must mean some sort of peace; to live was only to drag a weight of forlorn and useless wretchedness along the ways of the world. His time was past; his record was written. He had emptied life; he had eaten and drunk enough of gall and brine; therefore he resolved to die. Ruth might understand, and as a sad memory he must for ever haunt her hereafter. That circumstance he could not alter, because, living or dead, she would remember him.

Again the bubbles on the surface of this flood arrested him. He thought of another, and went so far as to go to the door and call Emmanuel Codd. It seemed to his brain that Jill had been gone for half an hour; but to his surprise blue dawnlight already filtered in at the window. The hour was after six o'clock. He ascertained anon that Codd had left Stone Park on the previous night and had not returned.

Through the earlier portions of that day Matthew Northmore doubted; but after noon he was steadfastly affirmed to make an end of himself. He chose a special theatre for the act, and proceeded thither in utter forgetfulness that he had already promised an appointment for that hour and place.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE TORN BIBLE

PETER TOOP called to see Ives one night and found him out. "Lord alone knows where the man is, or what's overtook him," said Jane Pomeroy. "He was gallivanting to Plymouth for a bit; then he came home in the worst tantrum as I've known since Avisa died. Nought's right. He ballyrags his very dog."

Thereupon Peter told Mrs. Pomeroy what she did not know, and related how Northmore had won Ruth Rendle.

"Why, then 'tis all explained," she said. "And no worse news could have come into this house. If he'd only done what I told him, years ago, they'd have been man and wife and me a double great-grandmother afore to-day. Yet maybe 'tis better the likes of him didn't breed."

"As to the unborn," said Mr. Toop, "I mind once talking to poor dear Avisa and I cried out, 'Lord! what a lot of things they'll have to do!' meaning the next generation. 'Yes,' she said, in her sudden, twinkling way, 'and one of the hardest will be to forgive us.' There's something in that."

"They be a lottery. You'll find parents as can

tell you, afore God, that their young never gave 'em a heartache, from the time they was born onwards; and there's others again whose faces shrink at the sound of a baby crying, as if it stabbed 'em to the heart."

"You speak what you know. But what I'm here about is the stone at Sampford Spiney. As you know, Ives will have a new marble one, and he wants me to allow a bit off for the slate; but that's unreasonable, because this Pomeroy slate is so thin to begin with that once 'tis cleaned there'll be nought left."

"Always gardening on his mother's grave now," said Jane. "But he cusses the church-tower something awful just because it can't help throwing its shadow there, so as Avisa's favourite red roses don't grow vitty. However, as I tell him, you might so well cuss the sun's self, or the whole order of things in general, as a church-tower."

"The impatience of him! He must have the very best of stone, of course, and then, because it took near a year to get the very best, he's down on me about it, and says I don't know my own business!"

Ives came in at this juncture, and Peter turned to him.

"'Tis about the tombstone for your dear mother. I'm wishing you could be more patient. Think of her patience! What would six months more or less have been to her?"

To Jane Pomeroy's surprise, her grandson took this admonition quietly. He seemed weary and dispirited.

"That's true enough," he said. "And if it wasn't, 'twould be no odds; for no man ever

hurried you yet—though perhaps a woman will afore long."

"Well, the stone will be at the shed for you to see next week; and as to the slate, I can't take it in part payment. 'Tis useless for any purpose. But I've added my mite to the marble, in the shape of fifteen per cent off, for respect of them under it, and more I can't do—especially as a man with marriage at the door. Good night, good night."

Peter hurried away to avoid argument over the superseded slate; but Ives was not interested.

"To think that woman, of all women, goes to an old man!" he said. His empty and lifeless voice struck Mrs. Pomeroy's attention.

"You'm tired, Ives."

"D'you know what's happened to me, grandmother? Ruth—Ruth's going to take Matthew Northmore. At least she thinks so; but I know better. I'll drop him to-morrow, like I'd drop a bullock with a pole-axe. I'll do it, if he don't give her up once for all."

"Don't you tell such terrible stuff, there's a good boy. You'll do far better to see Ruth than him. You're that sensible of late that you'll never go back now, I'm sure. 'Tis her good you'm seeking above your own—that is if you love her honest."

"Her good—yes; but it doesn't lie with Northmore. What have I done to choke her off me? That's the question. When I axed her to have me, what did she do? She fainted."

"Go to her; go to her again," advised the old woman. "In a way you've a right to know a bit more."

"Yes, I mean to know more; but 'tis the man

shall tell me. 'Tis for him to explain. And yet —what can he say more? She's going to marry him: that's all that matters—to him. And if she does, my life's done; and if I stop him, my life's done. So 'tis all up with me either way."

He talked for some time in this fashion, then he calmed down a little, confessed faults, and soothed himself.

"Mind you, I never rated her high enough—never. I took her too much for granted. When I decided that I'd offer for her, I reckoned the job was as good as done. 'Twas natural that she should feel the other man would wear better than me. I allow all that, but I can't suffer it. She shan't have him. I've sworn so. I know him better far than she does, and I know she'd be a miserable creature all her days along with that man."

"Think—think, Ives. Think how 'twould be if your mother was living."

"I know how 'twould be well enough. All different—all; because she would never have let this happen. Too fond of Ruth for that."

"But Ruth's old enough to judge for herself. There couldn't have gone no compulsion to it."

"How can I tell? I didn't hear his lies; 'tis the fashion of all my enemies to fight with lies behind my back. I'd . . . There; but I'm calm and sensible enough. I can read men easy, and easiest of all that man. Look back at him. 'Twas him that got me put in prison—his work. And he've never changed, never. From the moment he falled in love with Ruth, his secret hatred woke against me, and he lost no chance to do me an injury."

"He did nought, however."

"For why? Because I never gave him the opening. But he's done something now—so deep and dark that Ruth . . ."

He ate a meal and fell into silence. The hour grew late, and Mrs. Pomeroy began to get very sleepy. She strove to comfort him; then asked for a privilege.

"Read just a few verses, like a dear, afore I go," she said. "I've got to count on it, Ives, and I miss 'em a good bit when you'm not here."

Thus she spoke, because Ives, when at home, was accustomed nightly to read a chapter from the Bible for Jane's pleasure.

He now picked up the book from its place, turned to a marker in the Revelation of John, and began to read drearily. But after a dozen verses his own condition burst upon him and swept away all self-restraint. For a moment he was almost insane.

"God damn it!" he cried out passionately. "How can I read this tomfoolery and my life all wrecked and ended? Don't you know there's murder in me? Ban't I going to kill a man if he don't yield? Hell take the book! It's never done no good to me, and never will."

He flung the volume on the floor with both hands, and the cover burst off. He then leapt up almost distraught, and kicked it across the kitchen floor into a corner.

"Ives! Ives! You've tored the forels off your mother's Bible. Oh, Ives!"

He had sat down again and put his arms on the table and his head upon them.

"Go," he said. "Get to bed, grandmother. Leave me to finish this business my own way."

She began to creep over to the sacred book; but he bade her leave it alone.

"I tell you to go! Here . . ."

He rose and took a hot brick from the grate. She handed him an old woollen shawl, and he saw tears run down her face.

"Don't take on," he said. "'Tis no fault of yours."

He wrapped the shawl about the hot brick and then went up to her room in front of her. It was a customary event, and the brick kept his grandmother warm by night.

"Kiss me, Ives—and—and—pray afore you go to sleep—to please your dead mother, do it."

"Sleep—sleep! I shan't never sleep no more," he said. "I've done with sleep. There ban't no sleep for men who can tear Bibles and curse God."

He kissed her face and left her, and licked an old woman's tear off his lips as he went down the stairs. Age and weariness soon buried the ancient in oblivion; the man returned to his thoughts and his future. It was past midnight, and he calculated that sixteen hours must still separate him from his enemy. He considered how to pass them. He revolved the matter of taking Northmore's life, and for a long time was set remorselessly upon it.

CHAPTER XLIV

OLD TEXTS

THERE WAS NONE that Pomeroy could ask for help, and in his isolation, with a very poignant intensity, he realised how much Ruth had been to him—how much more than he had understood or appreciated. Only now, at the moment of loss, her precious qualities impressed themselves upon his brain. He returned to the kitchen, sat down by the fire, and reflected hour upon hour. He tried to state the case in terms, but only one clear fact dominated his senses. He wanted Ruth above all living things. That he might have her was his mother's hope and prayer. Avisa had worked for it; she had died desiring it. For a long time he occupied himself with the situation and believed that justice and right demanded the marriage between Ruth and himself. Then he endeavoured to appreciate the position from another standpoint. It was not until afterwards that he began to look out of Northmore's eyes. For the present he merely regarded Northmore's conduct through his own, and concluded that Matthew had used man's force in some evil way and driven Ruth to accept him despite her own aversion. Nothing could justify a step so infamous; no punishment could be too heavy for it.

But a saner outlook came anon. The clock purred two, and something of his mother's divine reasonableness awoke in Pomeroy and spread, like an anodyne, about the sore places of his soul. It quickened upon a thought, and for a season lifted him to more placid reflection. For the first time with honesty he strove to see from Matthew's standpoint. Northmore had never ceased from loving Ruth. Like a fixed star his worship had burnt unflickering through the years. He had seen the glory and value of Ruth, while Ives still turned from her as one of no account; long since he had read those secrets of character that made Ruth notable and rare, but only yesterday did the revelation dawn for Pomeroy.

And then he asked himself whether it was strange that she should put Northmore's enduring and steadfast worship before his sudden flame. He looked back to his mother's illness and Ruth's sojourn at the Vixen.

"She knows me too well," he thought. He told himself that right was happening; and then, upon this admission, the large, generous spirit died in him, as a light dies upon the sea. What were the other man's fortitude and faithfulness after all? What was Northmore? He was one who hunted Ruth as remorselessly as he hunted hares. A thousand times she had shown him that the thing he desired was hateful to her; a thousand times she had turned, and struggled, and made vantage of ground to escape from him. But he had run her down at the end. She was not dedicated to him; she was not sacred to him. No dying woman with her last conscious glance had woven them together.

Ferocity and fiery indignation reigned in Ives again. His instinct told him that he had made too good a case for Northmore. There was much more to know before he could tamely relinquish Ruth. Had not she and he trembled on the very brink of love a hundred times? She loved him, and, following that conviction, all changed again. He looked back through the years and saw her love at every turn. Little deeds, little thoughts, little impulses checked—they had taken place under his eyes; while his soul, busy with himself, had found no time to read them. Now they returned from the hoarding-places of memory, and he counted them, weighed them, wondered at them. Like glimmering dewdrops on a leaf had he and she stood beside each other waiting for the breath of the morning wind to run together. They had touched at last and must melt into each other. No power in all nature was strong enough to hold them asunder any more.

At three o'clock he remembered that little more than twelve hours kept him from the meeting with Northmore. He thought of his bed, but put it off a while. For another hour he walked up and down with long strides that fell heavily but silently. Then his foot touched something and he saw his mother's Bible. The cover lay apart. He picked up the book and marked beside it a piece of paper somewhat stained with age. One side was blank, but he turned it over and found words and letters. Next he picked up the cover of the book and went to the table.

The strip of paper was a list of references to many texts of Scripture. They had been set down by his mother, and evidences of time already marked the earlier entries. He noted that the

writing began somewhat shakily; then the figures and letters became strong and steady; and at last they shook again and grew very faint and feeble. The final reference was written with a lead pencil, and the characters trembled much. That these words and figures thus grew weak towards the end moved Ives more than the discovery of them. He gazed long and the present sank to sleep. Once again he lived through his mother's passing.

He rose at last and was going to put the paper with other memorials of her, cherished and hidden safely. Then, seeing the Bible at his elbow, he sat down again and idly turned to the text that headed this memorandum:

"*And teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.*"

His mother had set it down before a son or daughter came to her, and Pomeroy wondered whether the issue had been himself or one of his sisters. He sought the second text:

"*God hath judged me and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son.*"

It was the coming of Ives thus chronicled. His mother had prayed for a boy; and her God had sent Ives. He thought of Avisa's joy in his infancy and saw himself clouding it day by day. He feared to read further; then he turned to the third text. The writing was firm and strong again:

"*God be gracious unto thee, my son.*"

He speculated as to the age of this entry and

turned to yet another. This showed him that he was a baby still:

"*Can a woman forget her sucking child?*"

He saw himself cuddled at the breast that was dust; he caught the twinkle in his mother's eyes as she hugged him.

He read again, and the following text was quite trivial; yet the words had brought a smile to Avisa's eyes when she set them down; and they dimmed his now:

"*His mother made him a little coat.*"

He remembered how she had spoken of that little coat when her mind wandered on the shores of death.

A great wave of interest set Pomeroy's heart throbbing, and the present still slept for a while before this story from the past. Because here, through a channel never guessed, there flowed most precious intimacies between himself and his mother. They began before he was born, and they attended his babyhood. He suspected the tale of his life might be hidden in these texts —the whole journey seen through his mother's eyes and copied with love from the words of her only book. And yet he wondered, for his mother had neither driven him to the Bible nor much insisted upon it. He could seldom remember texts upon her lips; yet it seemed that her heart was stored with them.

Another question followed:

"*What shall I do for my son?*"

He was a boy now and she began to look ahead

for him. The next verse meant more than he could know or guess at:

"*And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers.*"

He remembered his father but faintly; yet Avisa had often told him that the elder Ives loved the younger well. What followed seemed the picture of a beautiful home; and still the texts dealt with a time before his recollection:

"*And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.*"

Ives wondered when first he began to break that peace and wake a new element in his mother's mind. The next verse spoke of sorrow and definitely fixed its own date in the little chronicle:

"*If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.*"

The words told that Avisa's little daughter was dead, and Pomeroy, now greedy of this close and precious revelation, almost resented the fact that another than himself found any place in it. He eagerly sought for himself again; but it seemed that a considerable interval of time had passed between the last entry and the next.

His father had now died and Avisa was alone:

"*Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*"

"*Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.*"

The story unfolded and the next three verses pointed very directly to himself:

"*Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with a rod, he shall not die.*"

"*Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.*"

There had always been hope in her heart for him. Nothing that he could do killed that imperishable emotion. She had died full of hope for him:

"*Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.*"

That prophecy was vain. How far had he himself strayed from the way that she had trained him to go? Where did he stand now? He turned impatiently forward and read again. The next text succeeded naturally upon the last and seemed to show his mother's hand tighten on him as she set herself to obey her guides:

"*It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.*"

Her yoke had ever been easy; yet he remembered the discipline too, and its apparent futility to build character or beget self-control. His face grew dark and sorrowful. Then woke a gracious, personal element in the dumb narrative that made him sad and happy together, and struck a solemn note for him which died not, from that day for ever, when the words recurred:

"*And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts. . . .*"

"*See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.*"

He dwelt very long over those words and turned onward reluctantly. For his soul told him there was sorrow hidden in the little figures and letters that remained. Childhood had ended; youth lay ahead. It could not be that any great hour of all the future hours had been forgotten by the unsleeping watchfulness that set down this story.

He read the last verses again, and they seemed good to him, and brought his boyhood very close. He looked back from man's standpoint, and understood as a child cannot understand. He perceived the grace and comeliness of his mother when she was young. He guessed that the young do not consider the youth of their mothers or understand it, more than mothers perceive the manhood and womanhood of those they have borne. To the child the parent is always old; to the parent the child never can be.

Ives lingered here upon the golden shore of a young mother's dream. And then he read on and saw the steadfast chronicler quelling her own doubts. Avisa began not to understand him. It was not egotism that appropriated the succeeding text to himself. It could refer to no other:

"*But wisdom is justified of her children.*"

He dropped the paper and stared in front of him. "I know how 'twas," he said to himself. "How well I know what was in mother's thought then! I hadn't begun to break her heart yet; but she's got a glimpse of such a thing falling out some day. And then she went to her book by night and found this, and rested on it."

The next verse, however, showed that his mother had not rested long. Her faith cried out

from Christ's generality to Christ's Self. She carried her best offering and set it before her Lord:

"*Master, I have brought unto thee my son.*"

It seemed necessary for Avisa to cry louder, that she might be heard:

"*Master, I beseech thee look upon my son.*"

Well he knew the things that were happening then; and very clearly he heard that heart-stricken cry that followed:

"*Lord, have mercy on my son.*"

"I slept in Tavistock prison the night she set that down," he thought. And then, reading the next verse, he pictured the days of waiting and the longing that each night would bring him back again, while still he tarried and would not return to her:

"*For her bowels yearned upon her son.*"

"The secrets of that woman's heart!" he thought.

The following verse told that he was home again:

"*As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.*"

A considerable space of years fell between this entry and the next intimate record; but two texts seemed to bridge the gulf and indicate leading trains of thought in the mother's mind. One was a general sentiment echoed of her own instinct:

"*For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.*"

The second sounded a hopeful spirit and spoke of a home at peace:

"*I have no greater joy than to know that my children walk in truth.*"

A direct admonishment to him came next, and spoke of the dawn of his great tribulation. This verse his mother had actually repeated to him in the past, and he recollected the fact clearly:

"*My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction.*"

Another verse from Proverbs followed and spoke of anxious days and nights for Avisa Pomeroy:

"*My son, be wise and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me.*"

He guessed at the hidden care and stress upon her now, and remembered that this happened when rest and mental peace were vital to her health. She felt that the cruel strain he had put upon her was more than she could bear in those days; and she had prayed that she might receive support and he salvation:

"*O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid.*"

It almost seemed that this, her great prayer, had been answered, for he remembered the event and how he had flung over Jill Bolt at the last

moment. His mother at least regarded the course which he had taken as victorious:

"*For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*"

There remained but one more reference. The writing was weak and the words and figures barely legible:

"*He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*"

She had yielded him up to her God at her death—but only then. Here lay recorded her farewell of him, and he understood the thought in her mind.

The magic of this discovery lingered like a gracious savour about the spirit of the man; then, into this new encompassment of thought, intruded his present circumstances, and he regarded the morrow. Day had already dawned, for the morning wind and a wan fore-token of light were at the casement together. He had taken two long hours to read this message, because there occurred lengthy intervals of thought between the brief morsels of it. They had stood merely as stepping-stones from point to point; they had been as texts for the tale of his life. From this great survey he came back to the present; but he did not come back alone. His mother's heart was beating in his; her spirit belonged to him as the intrinsic controller of his own. Again he turned to the Bible for a text that he remembered dimly. He knew the source of it and came upon it anon. Then he read it and set down chapter and verse under Avisa's last written word:

"*Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood.*"

What fruit should the scion of this stock ripen in the world's garden? Can we gather a thorn from a grape?

"That woman's son have got no choice!" he cried aloud to the morning.

CHAPTER XLV

SUNSET FIRE

DAY DAWNED in gloom and rose clothed with a garment of heavy rain that fell straight out of the low sky. No wind stirred, and only the foothills of the land thrust forth from the fog-banks that hid the hills. A sluggish air hung along the woodland ways, and aloft the grassy slopes glimmered grey with wet; the heather sulked; the battered brake-fern lay in water-sodden stretches; the lofty world of the tors sometimes showed like a shadow through the cloud-caps that enveloped it, then vanished again; the rain fell silently and steadily; the day passed its meridian and swiftly waned. And then light suddenly spoke and evening was brighter than noon had been. A low orange flame wakened westerly, and flickered along the edges of the mist. It played over the fringes of the vapour, found the river and flashed there. Parallel to earth it ran, and so struck the least stock or stone sharply; it decked the naked thorn tree in a network of jewels; it glittered on the furze and set the boulders burning.

The mists in level folds were impervious to this sudden flow of sunset light; but they acted as a background for the wonder, and against their

deep bosoms the world underwent a brief magic illumination, lurid and barbaric in its dazzling glare.

Seen and unseen were divided sharply. The very heart of the foreground was plucked out by these sunset fires; and behind them hung the cloud curtains, impenetrable to eye of man or ray of light.

Against the aerial darkness behind them the Lone Stones glowed like a circle of flames. Their ruddy stunted columns flashed here upon the hill; and all behind and beneath was purple shadow, and all before was the waning splendour of the west. Hither came Ives Pomeroy to his tryst and found himself the first there. The hour was about four o'clock, and Ives, upon his way, had taken a detour so that he might not go nigh Stone Park. He came armed only with the memory of the night, and he waited patiently in a sort of desolate peace; but he did not review his attitude or intention, for both were assured.

If Ruth loved this man better than she loved him, there ceased his right to say another word. He would, however, hear what Northmore had to tell him; because Matthew had promised a revelation, and he was come to learn it. No faltering marked the mind of Ives. He had passed through the secret height and depth of this tribulation; he was strong to yield. In his heart he had already yielded, and his renunciation might be called complete. On the side of reason only the surrender was not absolute. It remained to hear what Northmore had to say. Ives determined that, say what Matthew might, he would believe him.

Light failed fast, and sank, like a dying torch,

before the other man appeared. Out of the heath he rose, and Pomeroy, with his back against the great stone of the circle and his arms folded on his breast, stood motionless and watched him approach. Suddenly his interest increased as the master of Stone Park drew near, for there was much that appeared strange about him. A great change had come over Northmore. It seemed that he was drunk, and Pomeroy at first supposed that it must be so. There rose a sudden hate for this wretch in the mind of the younger. The foothold of Matthew was weak. He staggered and reeled forward. Once he stopped and sat on a stone and mopped his face. Then he seemed to observe the circle suddenly and came on again.

In doubt of his next action, and impressed with the folly of any meeting between this man and himself under these conditions, Ives hesitated; then he slipped down to be out of sight, crept near the farther rim of the ring, and crouched invisible that he might better judge of the other's state.

Northmore was quickly on the spot, and he stood there gasping a while with his face lifted. It shone with sweat and the sky painted its pallor yellow. The farmer was not drunk, but he suffered under great excitation. His eyes were terrible thus lighted by the sky, and they blazed with such a savage misery that the watcher supposed he looked upon a madman.

The unhappy spirit believed himself alone and turned his gaze round about the circle. Then he remembered a certain spot in it and flung himself down upon the reeking earth, where aforetime he had fallen when a woman first said nay to him. He remained motionless with his face to the

ground, and Pomeroy, making close scrutiny of him, saw that Matthew's hair was growing thin upon the poll.

Now Ives knew not what to do. He felt neither pity nor anger; but he found himself most deeply concerned to gather the meaning of this great passion. He wondered whether Ruth had changed her mind. Many reflections, doubts, and even hopes, sped hurtling through his brain; but still he watched and waited. In his excitement he peered boldly out from behind the stone that hid him; but Northmore was unconscious of any presence and his eyes were turned inward. Had every stone in that circle of stones suddenly revealed a watching man, he had not seen them.

Suddenly Matthew sat up, and acted swiftly while his heart held to its purpose. First he tore open his waistcoat and shirt; then he drew from his pocket a revolver and cocked it. He held it to his side; then changed his mind and lifted it to his head. The hesitation saved his life. For a moment this unexpected event struck Pomeroy motionless; then he leapt forward and shouted loudly as he did so. Northmore turned and started as he pulled the trigger. Thus only fire scorched his temple; the bullet missed it and struck off a splinter from the stone behind him. Opportunity to shoot again was not granted, for Ives tore the weapon away and flung it far into the fog. They stood silent, panting within arm's length of each other; and it was Matthew who spoke first.

"You—you of all men! What do you do here?"

"Me—yes. Who should it be? Wasn't we to meet here?"

Northmore looked at him as at a strange creation unfamiliar in his eyes.

"I come to meet my death—not you," he said.

"Button up your breast. You forgot I was to be here, but thank the Lord I didn't. You stare, but you're not more puzzled than me. You know a lot I don't, seemingly, else you'd never have come here to blow your brains out. And I know more than you. Since I've saved your life, I can tell you that a few hours agone I was minded to do for you what you meant to do for yourself. Yet now you've got to thank me that you're a living man."

The other seemed slowly to waken and return to his senses.

"There's no thanks due—no thanks due—no thanks due," he kept repeating in a monotonous voice, like an animal crying. "If I'd known that you meant to kill me I'd have come sooner. I want to go out of it. I must go out of it. Can mortal man face this and live?"

"Face what?" asked Ives. "Don't give way no more. You've come back to life by a short cut; and that's as much as to say you haven't done with the world, and the world haven't done with you. If what ails you is my work, let me know it. Things have happened to me too."

But the other had not yet gathered his shaken wits together. He had indeed returned to life by a short cut; and he remained dazed, obscured, inconsequent.

"Here she first said 'No,' and here I was going to make an end of it. You—you've done no service to me nor yet to yourself. What can she do now? It all depends on me—all—every atom

of it. She's promised—she'd never go from her word—not even if I told her that she had promised under false pretences. Never—the soul of honesty is that woman. She'd never go from her word, I tell you."

"And aren't you honest too?" asked Ives.

The other did not answer, but rambled on.

"I was dragged here to die—where she refused me first. Yes—she refused me once. That may surprise you. And why were you here—waiting, and why instead of letting me go out of your path did you . . .?"

"Come, come," said the saner man. "Get at peace with yourself. Quiet down your intellects afore you try to tell me what 'tis all about. Something very terrible must have happened, else you'd never have thought to do what you meant to do. You owe me more than hard words for preventing it. Let's walk along together."

Northmore did not answer for some time; then he began to try and explain.

"I came here to die," he said. "I wanted to die, because what I had planned and hoped and ordered—all tumbled to nothing. I forgot about meeting you. I never thought to see a human face again."

"Say as much or as little as you please," answered Ives. "I've had a bit of a sweat over this job too, and things came up before my eyes that opened 'em pretty wide to the real question. I mean afore all else for that woman to be happy, and so do you. And if she's going to be happy along with you—there, no need to make me say the words. But I've done with it. Anyway, I only want her good. If I can help her happiness by going out of the way, 'tis done. There 'tis

in plain words, and there's nought more to be said."

"No more to be said!"

"Keep moving—you'm wetted through. I'll see you home."

Gradually Northmore turned to a more coherent frame of mind. Then he essayed to explain the facts and did not spare himself in the process. Pomeroy heard all without speaking. He passed through many moods as the story with its plot unwound on Northmore's faltering tongue; but at the end one mighty fact swallowed lesser emotions. Ruth was free to do as she would; and she had only accepted Northmore out of love for Pomeroy.

"You're an honest man," said Ives at last. "I'll say nought about what you meant to do, and I've only one quarrel against you: that you believed your own eyes when you came on my matchbox. But that's natural enough seeing what promised to come of it, and all the rot I'd talked against you. And since you did believe it, I suppose 'twasn't in human nature to help using it and driving it home on Ruth."

"I don't want your pity, and as for punishment, you've punished me enough. I should be in eternal peace this minute if it wasn't for your hand. You've got your revenge so long as I live."

"'Tis not strange you felt a sudden want to be out of it. But—well—God knows I can't preach. Only this you shall swear to me afore I leave you: that you'll not make away with yourself. I'll dog you night and day until you swear it! For the sake of that woman, keep alive. I don't ax for myself. Her days will be darkened

for evermore if you kill yourself through her fault."

"I'll drag on with it somewhere—till the end."

"You can't say no fairer; and now I'm coming back-along with you—to have a drink. You want one."

So that significant scene faded upon a colourless idea, as the day faded upon colourless darkness.

The two men went away slowly together and left the circle empty. Whereupon the fog, as though waiting only for their departure, stole heavily up, thickened to fine rain, added gloom to night, and hid the Lone Stones and the great spaces round about. Water twinkled down the pillars; a dense and fumid air engulfed them; while beneath this dripping murk Nature's unforgetting finger brought life to each grey lichen, succour to the wounded stone. For her hand touched the bruised granite where a bullet had broken it, and the operation of healing began instantly upon infliction of the hurt.

CHAPTER XLVI

PRIMROSEN

THERE CAME a morning in early spring when Pomeroy left his home at the first light to keep an appointment. Some very striking new raiment appeared in his chamber, but he did not don these things. Instead he put on working-day attire and an old cap. Then he went out of doors, sank to Walla, crossed the stream, and ascended on the other side.

The sun had not risen, and only the earliest birds were waking. A thrush made sleepy music from a silver birch that stood on the edge of the grey light. The glens were full of dew, and the sky was almost clear.

Hither came Moleskin to meet Ives. The old man brought a little bunch of primroses culled from some secret spot familiar to him.

"You've kept your word," he said. "And so have I. 'Twas a promise to Ruth that if she was married any day after February I'd get her primrosen for her wedding gown. For certain she'll have braver blossoms too, but she promised for to wear these."

He handed Ives the flowers. Moleskin knew their haunts and the hidden places of their earliest budding.

"I hark back to boyhood come primrose time—always," he said. "I go back to the days when I was a bit of a lad. And all's the same—flowers, feathers, fins. They don't change no more than the bed of the river or the hovers of the trout. 'Tis only us that change. Smell 'em—just the same sweetness that met our great-great-grandmothers' noses. And they grow the same and peep out come the spring again, like maidens from behind their window-blinds."

"It's good to go back a bit if you'm old, I suppose," said Ives.

"Yes, it's good; but it's . . ." Moleskin broke off. "And so here's your wedding day, Pomeroy, and a fine one too! Tavistock at twelve o'clock. Don't fear as me and Mary will miss it. There's a whole rally of us driving over in Peter's wagonette. Him and his wife are coming too. Trust her!"

"Lizzie is along with Ruth to-night down there. But Arthur Brown can't get away. Here's his letter. 'Twill amuse you since you know the man."

He handed the communication to Moleskin, and while his neighbour read, smelt the primroses. The pure, pale lemon of the dawn was reflected in their petals; they would be on Ruth's breast soon; but he had nothing to envy them.

"A fine copybook hand, to be sure," said Moleskin.

"Yes, and a fine copybook mind behind it."

"Such men be the backbone of the nation, without a doubt. I see he tells that his youngster has been ill; and the good man is evidently a little bit surprised at God Almighty that He could suffer such a thing to happen."

"How's Mrs. Cawker?" asked Ives.

"Helping with her needle against our Mary's wedding. What a woman—eh? And what a frame! There'll be a great battle of soul against clay when that noble creature's got to go. But never mind; nobody but you and Ruth to-day. 'Tis your day. If your mother only wasn't gone! 'Twould have been her high-water mark of happiness to see you two joined presently."

"She don't seem as dead as she was," answered the other. "I can't make my meaning very clear, I'm afraid—yet, if any could grasp hold of it, perhaps you could. Why, man, my mother's nearer and more living to me, even now, than half of the real people in the world."

"Well, I understand! Some are more alive, though they be dead, than others all the days of their life. And her—her—why, she's not dead so long as you'm stirring, my bold hero! You may even grow to be worthy of such a mother yet."

"Never," he said. "No son can be worthy of such a woman as Avisa Pomeroy."

"Some of 'em used to wonder why you didn't take more after her; but 'twas only their blindness. I knowed she was there—waiting to show in you, poor chap. And out she came when most of you had need of her, I reckon. How's Matthew Northmore, by the same token? Have 'e heard ought of him?"

"He's not coming back—took a farm t'other side the Moor, Chaggyford way. He's well—so he says."

Moleskin nodded.

"A spark of wisdom in him not to come back. And it opens up the question of who'll have

Stone Park. We must hope for a large-hearted creature."

But Pomeroy was not considering Stone Park.

"Two," he said, harping back to the great matters in his mind—"two of the best women God ever made, and one—one bore me, and t'other be going to marry me. I've had a mighty deal more luck than I've earned, Moleskin."

"You have, without a doubt; but that's a very common thing—whether good luck or bad. Nought in nature's rarer than to see men or women getting what they've earned."

They had come down to the brink of the stream, and here parted.

"See you later," said Moleskin. "Take care of they primrosen, and joy go to her along with 'em."

As the men vanished, each upon his path, there wakened a great light out of the east, and the birds sang together. Dawn bloomed rather than broke—budded and bloomed where little cloudlets opened scarlet petals under the feet of day. Then heaven's transparent radiance finding earth, glittered over long leagues of dew, tinctured with gold the cradle of Walla, and kissed Dartmoor—Mother of rivers, Guardian of the rain—as she awoke and lifted her misty eyes to the morning.

THE END

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